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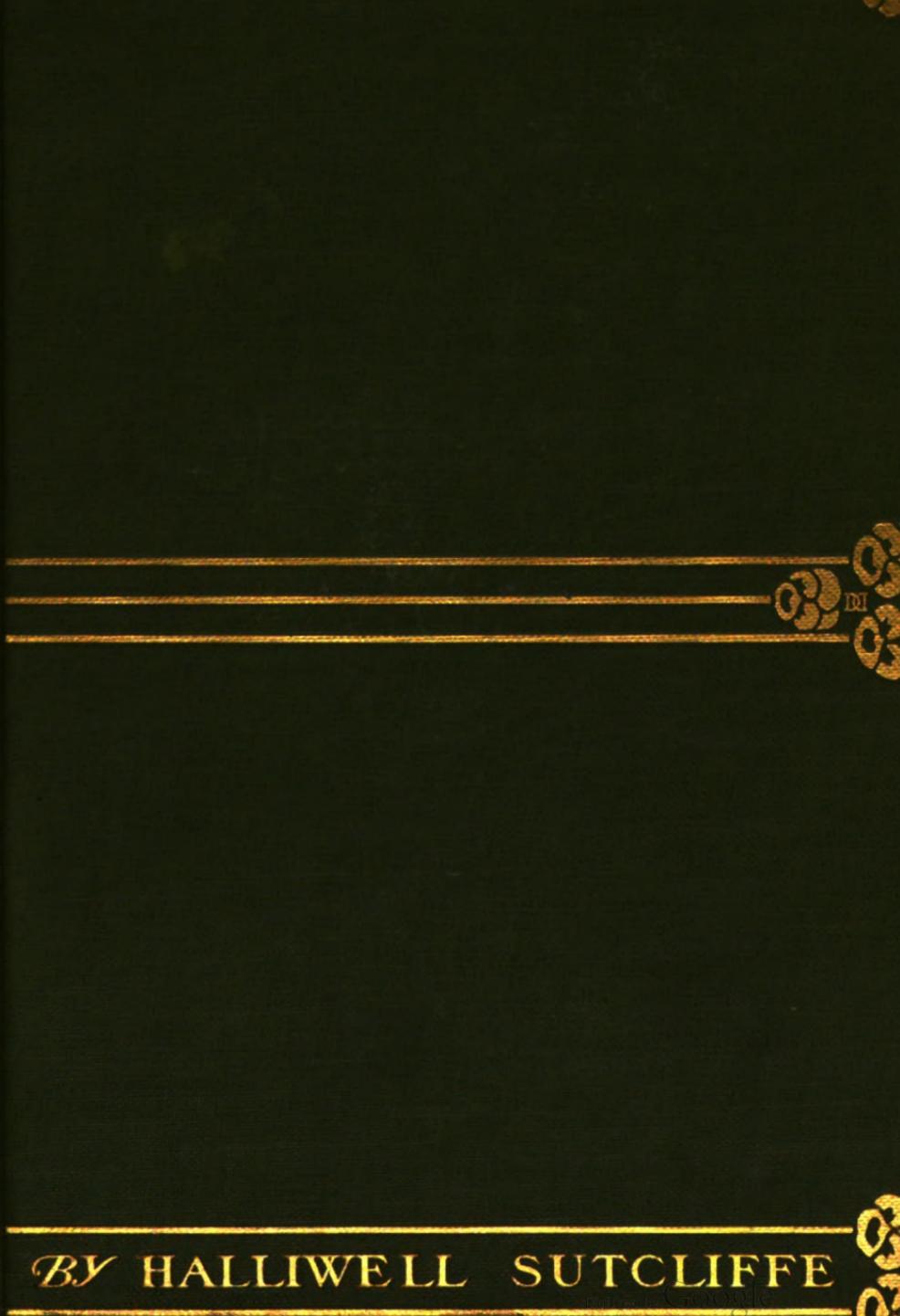
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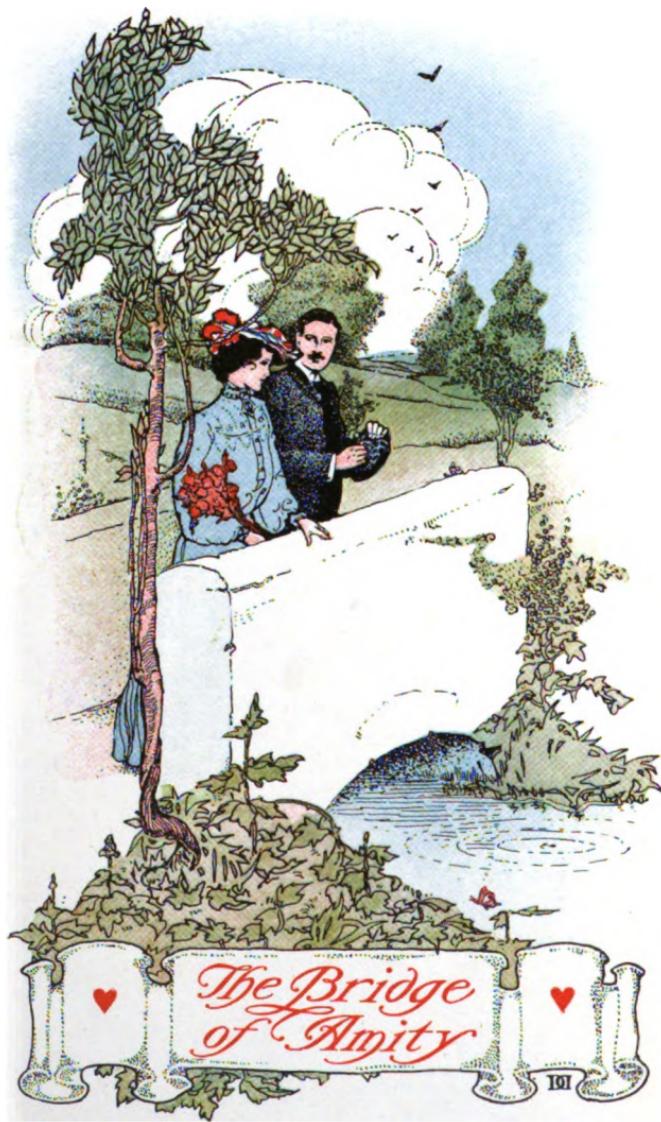
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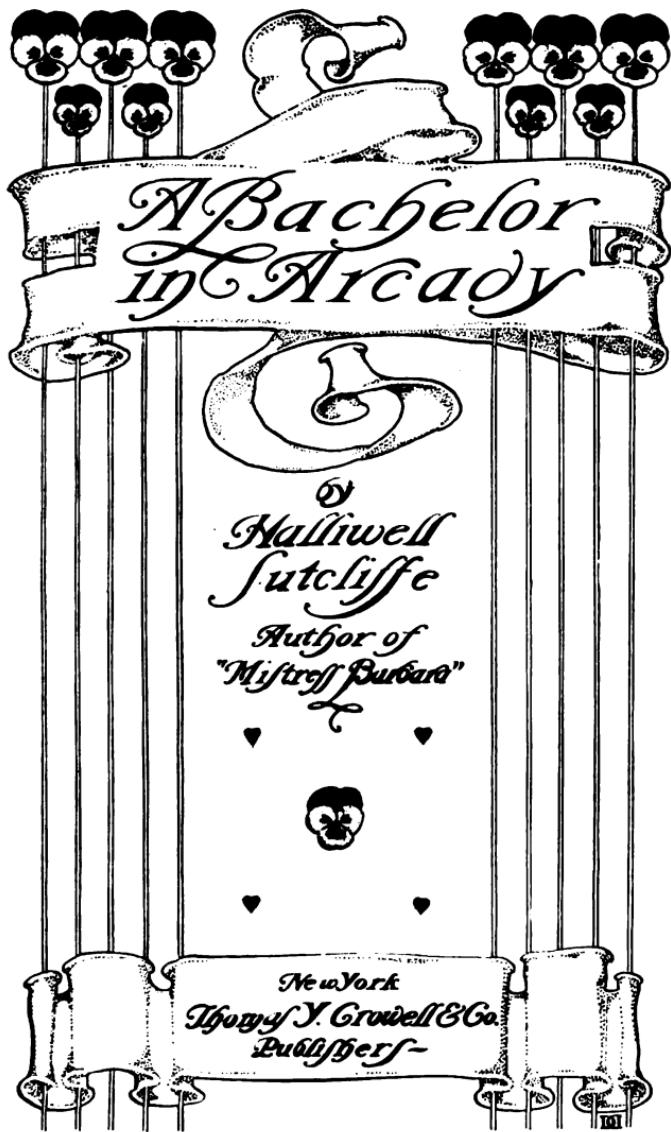


BY HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE

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A BACHELOR IN ARCADY

CHAPTER I

MY LITTLE COMMONWEALTH

IN a simple narrative of simple life it is as well to begin with a homely understanding of the house one sleeps in, the garden in which one lives, the neighbors, whose companionship is as salt to the wholesome food of one's days.

It is Arcady down here by the river, and though the house is overlarge, and the garden large but over-little, there is none of that wearing effort to live a so-called social life. A dinner party once in a while, maybe, a quiet game of bowls twice in the week or so on summer's evenings, a casual luncheon at some friend's as one returns from a long ride—these can scarcely be considered evidence of the true

A Bachelor in Arcady

social disposition. Yet society is not wanting ; the garden, and the score acres that lie about it, are full of comrades—comrades with few of the human vices, and with many virtues attributed usually to the best of our own kind.

The house—but this is unimportant, since it is little more than a place in which to sleep and eat—the house stands straight and tall, with gray-washed walls that are relieved only by green lattice-work here and there, up which the yellow jasmine and the flaunting clematis grow at their will. It is full of queer staircases within, and unexpected cupboards, and chambers, with low window-sills and diamond casements, that look out upon a gracious line of moorland hills.

As to the garden, it has its own peculiar air, an air of quiet distinction that is not lessened by its lack of formal beds. From the house-front a cool, wide stretch of lawn goes out to meet the great horse-chestnuts, the beeches, the limes, that hem it in on every side. To the left is a sunk fence, and beyond that a wilderness of woodland, where primroses and violets, foxgloves, blue geranium and meadow-sweet struggle one with another for the survival of

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the fittest. Wild pansies, too, are rife here, and they lift their pixie faces with a look of welcome and of amity peculiarly their own. Here and there are flower-beds, irregular, dropped from the clouds, it seems, with no especial regard for design ; the perennials, made lovable by generations of wholesome sentiment, have found a home here, and from peony to slender lily, from London Pride to the late-staying Michaelmas daisy, the season runs its course. Then the Michaelmas daisies grow ragged, and their lilac blooms lie prone against the sodden ground, and it seems that now at last the year is dead. But the year is never dead so far as flower-life goes, and by and by the bright anemones rear themselves, and bud and break into the kindliest blossoms, as if winter and rough weather were a jest. They keep us company till the first shoots of snow-drop and of crocus break through the grass—and, lo, the next year's sweet procession has begun. Flowers, surely, are the sun-dials of the year, that measure time, not by the niggard unit of an hour, but by months and seasons ; and these are the only clocks we need in Arcady.

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Beyond the lawn and the chestnuts lies the kitchen garden, walled with red brick—the mellow red of age. If the door happens to be open, and you look forward from the lawn, you see a graveled walk, a line of gooseberry bushes, a hint of cabbages toward the right, a row of hives set under the broad arch that frames the far end of the path.

It is here, in this walled place of peas and lettuces, that the true genius of the garden seems to find its home. Do we not make too much of flower cultivation, and realize too little the poetry of vegetables? Indeed, it is a doubtful taste that turns us to the cultivation of flowers, when Heaven in its bounty is willing to do all the work for us and leave us to enjoy the finished product. The perennials come up year by year with little need of help; the pansies, maybe, will not grow exhibition blooms if left to enjoy their bushy riot, but they will give us a wide, bloomy border that cannot well be matched. There are the shrubs, too—the lilac and laburnum, the ribes, and the barberry, and the fuschia—that offer each its posy to the garden. We can have a feast of flowers, and all the labor asked of us is a little weeding now

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and then, a little digging about the roots, a little pruning, and, time and time, a trifling rearrangement. It would seem almost that to cultivate our flowers too rigorously is as foolish as to teach our growing maidens calisthenics and the philosophies, instead of leaving them to the more wholesome tutoring of wind and weather, and their Mother, Nature.

Indeed, the logic of the thing seems clear. Flowers are sent us, as the skies are, and the hills, and the golden buttercups in spring, by way of presents from the kindly gods ; they are not asked to toil and spin, nor are we required to labor on their behalf. When the flower has gladdened our sight, and, through the eye, has warmed the soul that lies behind, its mission is fulfilled, and the fruit of its life is merely the seed that may grow other flowers next summer. But the fruits of the earth are of another race ; their flower is promise only, and you and I, if we want the promise kept, must help it to fulfilment. From midwinter to midsummer there need not be an idle day ; they are boy-children in the nursery, these beans and peas, these lettuces and cauliflowers, and as children we must tend them, constantly,

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watchfully, tenderly. Had they been girl-children, like the flowers, we could have trusted Nature to look after the beauty which should be all the usefulness they need.

So that, whether the standpoint be accounted sane or not, this red-walled garden, with its rows of hives that seem to set the busy note of work and growth, is to me the center of my little property. Next to it in importance rank those twenty acres which wrap the garden round and afterwards slope quietly to 'their guardian river. It is wonderful how much can be done with twenty acres. In a quiet way I rear ducks and geese and turkeys; there are three roan cows—one of them with calf—and an Alderney as mild-eyed as a deer; the six black pigs, and the four red ones, are a source of inoffensive pride; Jenny, the mare, and Rupert, the prideful beast who knows the first hunting day of the season as well as I, find plenty of grass in summer and well-won hay in winter to meet their dainty wants. Indeed, save for such matters as joints and cutlets, one might be on an island here, aloof from the bodily needs that take one's neighbors to the shops; from the first day of the year to

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Yule-tide there is always a supply of green stuff, of potatoes, of milk and butter, and fowls of many kinds. Fish from the river, trout and perch and carp, are all waiting for me at the foot of my own lawn—a stray pheasant, a wandering snipe, a brace of wood pigeons now and then, a hare as often as one wants one, vary one's diet by the way, and really there seems little need for those joints and cutlets upon which Mrs. Styles, my housekeeper, lays so much stress.

Styles is my good genius—much married to his buxom wife. The kitchen garden is my own ground, not to be touched by other hands, but I confess that things would go hard with those twenty acres were it not for Styles. He is known to intimates as "Tom Lad"—to myself among others, when a pipe and glass of beer together, after the day's work, have mellowed comradeship. Tom Lad is tall, none too broad, with an easy swing of his limbs, and an arm that seems all bone and muscle; he can neither read nor write, yet is, in his own way, the best-educated man I know, and a curiously delightful companion when he mellows into converse. His judgment of men is shrewd, his

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humor unfailing ; he can scythe a meadow or milk a cow with any man ; he is wise in the ways of dogs, and a bit of a pigeon-fancier ; he is at home with the works of an eight-day clock, can build a hot-frame or a greenhouse ; he seems to have the king's gift of healing where the sickness of dumb things is in case, and three times at least he has saved one or other of my cows when milk fever had put recovery almost out of question. Then, too, he can hive a swarm of bees very cleverly, and Mare Jenny owes her prosperous, sleek comeliness to Tom Lad ; he is, indeed, Jack of all Trades, and master of most.

One weakness he has, I must admit. His views on kitchen gardening are bigoted ; he will come and look with a sour eye on my experiments ; he believes that what was good enough for his father and grandfather before him is good enough for me, and he is sure that peas podded better in the olden days, before chemical manures were made or thought of.

" Well, sir, you're wasting time and money," he said to me only this morning, as I looked up from feeding a row of exhibition cabbages with silicate—looked up to find Tom leaning

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back upon a spade and regarding me with sorrowful, quiet eyes.

“Never mind, Tom, we'll pay for it out of the farm,” I return, with a diplomacy begotten of long practise.

Tom smiles in his slow, non-committing way ; the flattery is pleasing to him.

“We'll need to, sir. Work's work, and some of us must work if other-some go playing.”

This is delicious. It pleases me always to note Tom Lad's assumption that it is he who maintains the fortunes of the house. Perhaps he does ; yet I feel vaguely at such times that, with agriculture in its present state, not even the proceeds of my twenty acres would support us were there no easy-going balance at my banker's.

I do not grudge Tom Lad these triumphs ; partly because I know them due to the sort of jealousy which in itself is praise, partly because there is pretty sure to be a Nemesis awaiting him in the roomy old farmhouse, that is merely, with its attendant laithe and mistals, a continuation of my own. I erred when I said that Tom has only the one weakness, for he has two —and the second is his dread of Mrs. Styles.

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You can picture Mrs. Styles without an effort. Ample of girth, shrewd of face, with cheeks as red and wholesome-sweet as wind can make them ; clean to the verge of monomania, whether milk-pans or her own person be in question ; possessed of a tongue as comforting as an east wind with rain in it, and of a heart as tender as spring meadow-grass ; as much a woman of her hands as Tom Lad is a man of his ; mighty at the churn, in the fowlhouse, at the making of a succulent repast ; lenient with her children, and overbearing with her good man. That is Mrs. Styles, and Tom Lad is rarely known to air his views, or even to have any, when he finds himself within the four walls of the farmyard kitchen.

I found Tom Lad the other day in the grape-house, busy with thinning out the growing fruit ; he was whistling softly, with a quiet and not-to-be-mistaken gaiety.

"The world seems right with you to-day, Tom Lad," I said.

"Yes, sir. There's a wonderful lot of comfort in a greenhouse. The missus began to talk after breakfast this morning--her tongue is a longish one, as you'll know--and I be-

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thought me the grapes wanted thinning, and I just up and out without a word. She was not best pleased, the missus—but *I* was. Oh, ay, there's a wonderful lot of comfort in a green-house; I could well like to take bite and sup here, if I had my way."

Yet they are a devoted couple in their way, and the "fratchings" are of no greater moment than gnat-bites on a summer's evening. Last year, when Tom cut himself rather badly in sharpening a scythe, and when six weeks of blood-poisoning set in, Mrs. Styles grew as tender as a lass with her first lover, and Tom told me—strictly in confidence, of course—that he rather fancied he'd like to cut himself once a month or so.

There are two children of the Styles' household—a boy and a girl. The boy, Dick, in his father's parlance, is as "wick as whins," and his capacity for mischief seems to know neither abatement nor fatigue; the girl, on the other hand, is more like a shy, wild pansy than anything I know, and she follows me about the kitchen garden as faithfully as the couple of robins who, like true laborers, seek their livelihood at the spade-end.

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Add to these a couple of farm lads, directly under Tom Lad's vigilant eye, and the inhabitants—the human sort, at any rate—of our little commonwealth are numbered. As to the animals about us, I scarcely know from one day to another what guests I have, so frequent are the additions made by Tom Lad or myself.

Altogether we are an Arcadian family, with a curious aloofness from responsibility or care. I enjoy most of the comforts of wedlock without the wearing responsibility of a wife; my trusty Tom Lad is free, within easy limits, to be master of the twenty acres, the pigs, the cows, the geese; Mrs. Styles has the range of her tongue, plenty of the work she loves, an oaken dresser stocked with prizes won at dairy shows; the children come and go as they will, and seem to have adopted me, in a loose way, as an uncle or a second father.

I would have it noticed especially that Mrs. Styles is the only woman in my Arcady; that is my strength and mighty solace, and in idle moments I confess that I plume myself a little on a discernment rare even among those who seek for Arcady. For Arcady, be it known, is

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a place distinct from Eden in respect of its lack of certain disconcerting temptations, and no woman under middle-age need seek to enter. In early days I was tempted, certainly, to admit a parlor-maid, a housemaid, and what not, into our charmed circle, but I took counsel with myself, and considered the wisdom of the ancients, and went out to look upon the signboard of the village tavern—a rare signboard, by the way, figuring a man stooping under a woman's burden, and underneath the legend, "The Man Loaded with Mischief." It is a comforting signboard, with sound wit and a moral painted on its face, and I found encouragement from its philosophy to avoid the overloading of my staff. Nor do I tax Mrs. Styles's powers unduly; living out of doors as much as I do, I need but little service, and my henchwoman is so admirable a cook that she can afford to be wanting somewhat as a waitress. If I entertain the Squire and Cathy, as often happens—well, they know "Stylesey" as intimately almost as they know myself, and the Squire is perpetually offering her vast bribes in order to induce her to supplant his own cook.

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"Thank you, sir, you're very kind, sir," she always answers, quietly, "but I'm a bit like a cat, in a manner of speaking, and I get so I couldn't rest in a different house."

"So there's no attachment to the master—only to the house?" I suggest.

"Well, there—you see, I knew your mother before you, sir, and that seems to make a difference."

With this vaguely-worded assurance Mrs. Styles removes the last of the dishes and deftly moves towards the kitchen.

So "Stylesey" is still with me, and I am still in what is, to all intents and purposes, a womanless land. When married friends—recently married friends, I mean—come to me and, under the influence of late hours and good cheer, confess that they have found their Eden at last, I smile in a tranquil fashion. They do not guess it, but they have only won a short-lived Eden, while I am in perpetual Arcady.

CHAPTER II

PANSIES AND THE BABE

WHAT more do we want in Arcady? Well, I suppose that perfect content implies stagnation, and we are continually, one or other of us, adding to our varied stock of animals, four-footed and two-footed, feathered, horned, or furred. Once I was persuaded, in a moment of lunacy, to purchase a couple of goats from an itinerant vendor, who happened to please me by his talk ; I cannot see what reasonable connection there was between the rogue's conversation and my new-found desire to keep goats ; but I bought them, and became attached to them—as one does to any animal in time—and kept them in spite of strange devilries which they wreaked on me and mine. Then Tom Lad—to whom barter is sweeter than old ale, though usually, I fancy, he

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combines the two—Tom Lad, only the other day, chanced on a dozen geese which he bought, as he imagined, for something well below their market-price. They were Irish geese, as it proved—"light to fly, and light to weigh," as the proverb goes among the knowing folk—and they were not long in negotiating the fence which had penned in many successive flocks of their staider English brethren.

Perhaps I have not explained that pansy-growing is a minor hobby of mine; indeed, I am ashamed to admit as much, after my definite protest against the cultivation of mere flowers. Pansies, however, do claim a fair share of my time, and there is a curious delight in rearing, after years and years of care, a variety so new as to merit a name of its own. So infinite the faces are in their variety, so surprising the chances that may bring out your seedling a mere ordinary pansy or an ugly duckling which grows to unsuspected grace. Yet pansy-culture has its drawbacks, particularly if you happen to keep geese.

I had lately planted out a dozen or so of a fine new variety, and had spent a good part of yesterday in admiring the shape, the color, the

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bloom, of these latest of my children. This morning, on drawing the blind and putting my head out of the window to learn where sat the wind, I saw half the geese browsing in the neighborhood of my pansy-bed. I slipped on some apology for clothes and raced across the lawn ; the geese stayed still and regarded me with a look of devilry and quiet laughter which told me they had done their worst. A glance at the bed revealed something between a hen-run and a plowed field ; those twelve new pansies, waiting only for name and fame, had disappeared completely.

“ Is this what you meant by securing ‘ a bargain,’ when you suggested keeping geese ? ” I asked Tom Lad, who strolled across to wish me good morning.

“ Well, I fancied they might be a bit lively as time went on,” says Tom, with guarded cheeriness.

“ Humph ! And it is nothing, of course, to work for three years at one strain of pansy, and then——”

“ Bless you, sir, geese and men folk must have their bit of fun ! Look at 'em now ; they're as innocent as a pair of lambs, and you

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can find plenty of pansies where the others came from."

"Thank you, Tom—will you kindly remove your protégés?" I put in frigidly.

It is the custom in our household to assign the ownership of any animal to the nearest available person, when the animal in question happens to be in disgrace.

In the midst of my wrath I was conscious of a light step on the gravel, and turned to find the Child regarding me. I always call her the Child, though she is seventeen to my certain knowledge; but then, she *is* so babe-like, and we were chums when she first learnt the uses of a pinafore. She is not a person to be described at all; one would as soon think of describing the breeze of a summer's dawn, or the scent of lilac when the spring is young; whenever the Child appears, you wonder why the place was so empty a moment since, and not even the wantonness of browsing geese can cloud your temper seriously.

"Good morning, Babe," I said, turning from the ruined bed.

She nodded, with an air of mock gravity, at the place where the pansies had been. "Is it

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the geese?" she asked anxiously. "I saw Tom driving them back just now to their run."

"Yes, it is the geese. Tom Lad says it is only their fun, but I don't see the humor, Cathy. You see, I was going to name the pansies after you."

A little flush came into her cheeks; I have seen something like it now and then when the red and the white dog-rose have mated and produced a wonderful pink bloom.

"Were you really?" she cries. "Should I be like Catherine Mermet, and all those other delightful people who have given their names to roses?"

"Yes, exactly, and you would figure in the catalogues, Babe—always provided I was not selfish enough to keep my pansies to myself."

"That has always seemed such a pretty notion to me," Cathy goes on, with her little air of eagerness. "What do we know of Catherine Mermet, you and I? She may never have done anything in her life—never taken a fence, I mean, or shot a grouse, or hooked a trout—she may have been dumpy and plain and a frightful bore in real life—but see what she gains by having a rose named after her."

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"I was going to name my pansy 'the Babe,'" I said.

Her face fell. "When will you learn that I am quite grown up?" she demanded, with that clear, disconcerting gaze of hers.

"Never, I hope. Anybody can grow up, Cathy, and it's so embarrassing a thing to do."

After a moment's pause she decided to elude further discussion of her claims; and indeed, they were absurd.

"Have you lost *all* the plants?" she asked, with another glance at the pansy-bed.

"Well, no. I kept a second dozen in reserve; but if they go, the whole strain goes, and I didn't want to draw on them just yet."

"You will name them after me?"

"After the Babe. Not after any grown-up person."

"Oh, very well," she assents, with a half-sigh. "And I'm not sure, after all," she adds naïvely, "that I want to be grown-up at all. If Dad once realized it—well—I don't suppose I should be allowed to roam about as I do. Come and show me the pansies, and we'll find a place in the kitchen garden for them, where the geese can't get at them."

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We decided on a sheltered corner underneath the south wall, and afterwards strolled out to the rustic bridge that spanned the boundary-stream between the Squire's lands and my own. Have I explained that Cathy is the Squire's daughter, and that the Squire himself is my friendliest neighbor? Introductions of this kind seem so little needed in the country, and much must be forgiven to a man who only takes to paper and pencil by way of idleness after the serious business of pansy and of vegetable growing has been attended to.

"I like the old legend of the bridge," I said, as we leaned idly against the topmost rail and watched the trout come speckled up the peaty stream.

Again that wild-rose color came into her face. A babe, when she is seventeen, seems prone to sudden humors.

"How far back does it go?" she asked.

"Three centuries or so. Do you remember that my folk had a decently good standing in the county then?"

"You have it now!" she cried indignantly.

"Well, we have—shriveled a little, you know, Babe. Twenty acres and a cow or two

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are not exactly what those good old gambling folk of mine once had—though, to be sure, there was a little money left which they could not touch."

"Do you—do you miss it?" she asks, with queer gentleness.

"Not a bit. I'm quite an elderly person, Babe, though we did once climb trees together—so elderly that I have learned that enough is better than a feast. This legend, now—do you remember how one of your forebears claimed this bit of meadow by the river, and how one of my forebears claimed it; and how they fought with sword and pistol about it—and afterwards with lawyers, which was more deadly still—until at last a man from my house married a maid from yours——"

"And the bridge was built in token of new friendship," she added; "and it was named the Bridge of Amity."

Her face was turned towards the water, and she would not look at me.

"Fancy, a friendship of three centuries' standing, Babe! What good chums we ought to be!"

"Well, so we are," she said, with a sudden

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upward glance, and a laugh that was whole-heartedly her own.

"And the bridge still stands," I went on, rather aimlessly.

"The last flood *nearly* broke it down."

"It would have been mended again."

"Why are you talking like a book, Murphy?"

She is just an elf, after all, this lassie who pretends to be grown up. That trick she has of ruffling her hair about her eyes and laughing at you under the flimsy disguise, is elfish; then, too, who but she would remember that ridiculous name of Murphy, given me long ago when I had a mania for potatoes roasted in their jackets on the greenhouse fire?

"I never talk like a book, Babe. I haven't had practise enough," I answer lazily.

"It is a pretty legend, after all," she says, with some inconsequence. "Even Dad grows sentimental about it now and then, and talks of the bridge as though it were some living thing. Oh, and, I nearly forgot; I came to ask you if you would come up and lunch with us; father wants you to ride over to Hill Farm with him—something about drains, or pigs, I forget which."

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"But, Cathy, there are three rows of peas to be sown!"

"Murphy, you are rather absurd about your kitchen garden; you take it so seriously; and father seemed so anxious you should come, for you know how he hates doing anything alone. Besides, you *have* to come, so it is settled."

The Babe is a despot of the most bigoted type; when she was quite little—too little to be worth while to thwart—I dropped into the habit of yielding to her whims, and habits quickly grow on one. Moreover, I wanted to abandon my pea-sowing; I was eager, you understand, to see the condition of the drains—or the pigs—at Hill Farm; and then one always has such pleasant meals at the Hall, with Cathy there to add a flavor to one's meat.

As we crossed the Bridge of Amity and turned for a glance at the pleasant scene behind us, I saw Mrs. Styles crossing the lawn with a basket of eggs on her arm. She stopped on seeing us, and I fancied that she shook her head despondently; it might well be, for Stylesey is always sad a little when she knows I am enjoying myself.

It is no more easy to describe the Squire,

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than it was awhile since to draw Cathy's picture, even in the rough way sufficient to make you feel you would know him if you chanced to meet each other on the road. I have known him since I received his first unappreciated gift of a christening-cup ; his ways and looks are so familiar to me that I forget them when I wish to set them down, just as an actor forgets his part by too long repetition ; it would be as easy to describe one's father, or one's bosom friend.

He is neither old nor young, the Squire. No one would take liberties with him on the strength of youth, and yet it seems a trifle odd that he should have a daughter of seventeen. He stands six feet in shooting boots, has a back as broad as a farmer's, and his hair, brown and crisp as a youngster's, frames a merry, wholesome face, with eyes that harbor charity, and a mouth that tells of a steadfastness which may border upon obstinacy at times.

He is, in a word, a North Country Squire, which has a subtle meaning of its own. It is not a land of curtseys, this Northern Country of ours, and few of his tenants touch their caps to him ; he does not look for these things, but

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meets his folk as they wish to be met, on the ground of mutual respect and honesty.

Our relationship is a delightful one. It is useless to think of him as a godfather; he is just the jolliest of elder brothers, and now that boyhood's scrapes are done with, I seem to be drifting insensibly, year by year, into this brotherly attitude of mind towards him.

As for Cathy, she's a child, of course, and that in itself is what Cathy would call "jolly." There is no need for a chaperone, to frown like a leaden sky upon our sweet, Arcadian intercourse; the child will always be a child to me, and we can meet by stream or coppice with the ease of long acquaintance. Such days we have together! For sometimes Cathy, being a wilful maid, with something of a regal imperiousness about her, will tire of seeing her father and myself go out to ride or shoot or fish together, and she will claim a day's junketing on her own account. The Squire, on these occasions, finds arrears of estate business that need attention, and makes me the deputy guardian of his daughter. Suppose it is June, with a hint of fly upon the streams, we pack our knapsack, and fish up the river till we are

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tired and thirsty ; then we sit down, and marvel all afresh how much good cheer can be crammed into one knapsack ; and after that we fish till the gloaming warns us it is time to learn how the good Squire is faring. The good Squire, we find—whose fears for our safety we have discussed, with a luxury of trepidation—is drinking his after-dinner claret when we come into the dining-room. He does not appear agitated at all ; indeed, he has the appearance of a man who has welcomed each course as it came, and who has done the best by it.

“ I dine at seven, youngsters ; you may please yourselves,” is his greeting.

We profess our sorrow, of course—our forgetfulness of time in whipping Silverstream Brook —our certainty that the Hall clocks are fast by an hour or two. He listens good humoredly—indeed, he can afford to be good tempered with claret of that vintage before him—and he smiles lazily at us.

“ When I was a youngster, I cared little whether dinner was hot or lukewarm ; you will find that lofty outlook desert you by and by. Now, sit down, the pair of you—oh, nonsense about your dress, boy ; it’s the dinner that

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matters—and tell me about the fish. Did you try the shoal just below Didcott Bridge?"

And then we are in the midst of anglers' talk, and the Babe fibs like a veteran as to her captures.

Altogether, these days and evenings spent with Cathy are not the least part of the charm of Arcady; sometimes I think they are the keynote of that charm. Yet this sounds treasonable, in some way that I cannot understand, to all my settled views of life.

Yet she's a Babe. Cathy is just a Babe, and she must fit in with my philosophy by hook or crook. I could lose my philosophy more cheerfully, I think, than I could lose the Child.

CHAPTER III

ON THE KEEPING OF OLD DOGS AND THE NEED OF GIRL CHILDREN.

IT goes without saying that we are doggy ; Arcady would lack a primary charm if it were dogless, and there are four to keep us company. Chief of the tribe, in dignity and in consciousness of the same, is Angus, the Scotch hound. His full title is Angus MacLeod, but intimates prefer the shorter style—while Cathy, I regret to say, will address him only by the corrupted name of "Cloudy." From MacLeod to Cloudy is only a step, to be sure ; but it is the step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and the good beast feels it, I can see, though natural courtesy and a marked liking for the child allow him to show his feelings as little as may be.

There is no doubt that Angus MacLeod is a gentleman of fine blood and finer manners. The vulgarities of life, the foolish interludes

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enjoyed by meaner dogs, are as if they were not for MacLeod ; he sits like a model of some antique picture, and his lofty nose is reared above the common issues of our world. You can love friend Angus, and he can love you with unstinting loyalty; but there is a reserve about him, a pleasant Scotch reserve, that marks even the softest amenities between dog and master. Angus would not give way to tears, I believe, if anything happened to me; but his grief would be no less sincere for its repression.

Donald, the Irish setter, is just a sportsman ; he has few interests apart from hunting, and, like all specialists who have cleverness to back their industry, he has made a wonderfully finished art of sport. His one drawback is a tendency to criticism ; he knows his subject, and is entitled to speak with authority ; but it is none the less irritating, when one has missed an easy shot, to see him turn his head and *talk to one for one's good*. He atones for this, however, by applauding a good bit of marksmanship ; for surely no tail ever in this world expressed such glee as Donald's can.

Then Tom Lad has his farm dog, who, like

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Donald, has his own special interests in life, and who pursues them with a grave and admirable industry. Shep is not beautiful according to accepted canons ; but he has every point that belongs to that old North Country breed of sheep dog which is dying out so fast. Gray of body, square of head, uncompromising of will, he can yet show himself as lithe as a hound when sheep or cattle are to be driven ; he has, too, a sneaking fondness for children, and of this, his one luxury, he is ashamed.

Last of all comes Flick, the fox-terrier. Poor Flick ! He has a good many years behind him, and his place is by the hearth, where he can sit and read fire pictures of the past among the glowing coals. Flick's pedigree is as long as Lady Love Lane, and mighty sires have fathered him and his ; but old age spares neither peasant nor aristocrat, and pride of race glows dim within his doggy soul.

Ay, Poor Flick, indeed ! The thought of him brings one always to that vexed problem of the keeping of old dogs. Is it right, is it fair to the outworn beast himself ? How often that question will obtrude itself—is it kindly to let an old familiar comrade die of a senility

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that is comfortless altogether? A dog grows to be more than a dog after long years of friendship, and, to put aside the course of Nature, seems murder; on the other hand, this lame, blear-eyed, unhealthy bit of dogdom is so piteously unlike the terrier one has known. It will sadden the retrospect, when he is gone, to think of him in these last days.

He was so game, so full of the joy of his days, and he feels the loss of things that are worth while. This morning only, he limped beside me up the river path, and a brown rat got out from the water-logged roots almost beneath his nose; and he cocked his head with pathetic imitation of the real fervor, and a palsied shiver ran down his body. But that was all; the rat was away, and my old friend turned to look at me—so wistfully, so shame-facedly. He asked me, in plain speech, where his lusty doghood had gone, and why it had gone, and of what use he was in a world of shadows. And I could not answer him.

Poor Flick! I can see so many questions in his eyes of late. He feels his weakness, and resents it, as brave folk do. He does not want to crawl about and blink his hours away in

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sunlit corners ; he wants to be up and doing, and he cannot talk out the mysteries of life and fate. Surely, surely, he would be better away from the useless flesh that cumbers all the soul of him.

Yet one could never sanction a friend's murderer. He trusts one so ; and even now, as he dozes in the sun, there come to him, I fancy, vague hopes of better things in store ; he is not well, he tells himself, but with another spring he will be strong again ; and perhaps—who knows ?—such hopes make life still bearable for him.

At any rate, it is saddening, and a man knows not what to do. One thing only can be done—to talk to him, to invent quiet ways of smoothing out his leisure, to pretend that one finds him still the brave old Flick of yore. And the process is humanizing.

But yet—is it right to keep him ?

Poor Flick !

As usual, I am scribbling on the seat beneath the lime trees, and I am roused from my absorption by that voice of quiet sorrow which is Flick's alone. I look down to find him lying across my boots—a favorite attitude of his—

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and his eyes, as they meet mine, seem to understand that I know all about his troubles. Before we grow sentimental, however, Tom Lad disturbs us.

"Could you spare me a minute, sir?" he asks.

I am always "sparing minutes" to people, it seems, but I acquiesce with a patience that has grown on me.

Tom's step is light as he leads the way to the kitchen garden and holds the door open for me to pass through. The set of his face suggests that he is going to be courteously merry at my expense; he stops in front of the tangled currant bushes that line the north wall, and he shows me, one by one, three nests —two blackbirds' and a thrush's snugly hidden in the leafage. Each nest has its family of youngsters, protesting with yellow, open throats that they are ready for another meal.

"They are coming on, Tom," I said—cheerfully, though I knew well what was to follow.

"Coming on? Yes, sir, they're coming on; and what's the use of rearing peas if ye let 'em come on? As well rear mice and cats together, as birds and peas."

I should explain that the birds our pensioners

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be, all through the long months of our Northern winter; we feed them in a spendthrift way, and the lawn is full of every imaginable feathered thing that has not migrated to a warmer clime. Each winter the old feud between myself and Tom Lad awakes from sleep and rages fiercely. Tom will come—say, at breakfast time on a rimy morning—and stand beside me at the corner of the lawn, and watch the pheasants and the rooks, the thrushes and the blackbirds, the wrens and tits and jackdaws, as they scramble for their share.

“I’d shoot the lot, sir, instead of feeding them,” says Tom at last, unable to restrain his wrath.

“But I want to see them about.”

“Well, you’ll *see them about*, sir, never fear, when it comes to seed-time. You mark my words; you’ll wish over and over again you’d never let them come to breeding season. Look you, sir; every hen bird yonder that you’re feeding is safe for half a dozen young ones, and every young one is safe, let’s say, to swallow a pint of pea seed. Reckon that up by ‘rithmetic—I never was a scholar myself—and you’ll see——”

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I generally interrupt Tom Lad at this point of his discourse, and he departs with a tragic farewell.

"It's murder—fair murder, to rear up such live stock against crops that never did them any harm."

Tom cares little for birds, unless they be of a marketable kind, but for crops he has a personal love, and it is a genuine riddle to him, this deliberate fostering of the feathered tribe. The feeding goes on, however, for I never yield, even to Tom Lad, on certain points. It is a lightening of the winter days to have these chattering guests about me; they give one a feeling almost baronial, as if one kept open door and a free table for every wanderer who cared to enter.

Then, too, if the truth must out—I am diffident about the confession, for it smacks of sentiment—I can never rid myself of the belief that birds are true gentlemen, who will understand the obligations of their guestship. Surely it will be clear to them that they are free of the one end of the garden, and welcome to all the breadstuff I can give them, but that they are bound in honor not to thieve within the

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precincts of the four red walls of brick. Each summer brings a rude awakening ; yet always, as the days grow shorter, and the wind begins to stir the last dead leaves, and they come, these plausible gentlemen of fortune, with ruffled coats and wistful eyes, and a look of "Charity, fair sir ; give of your bounty to poor wayfarers"—why, one forgets the far-off seed-time, and lets the old delusion reassert itself, and spreads the feast anew upon the snow-topped lawn.

Even now, as I stand with Tom Lad and watch the young blackbirds cheeping at the empty air, I cannot feel bloodthirsty. It is a bit of sheer effrontery, of course, on the mothers' part, to rear their offspring in the very place forbidden them ; I know as well as can be that the youngsters will be reared in the belief that this is their own especial territory ; yet who could harbor evil thoughts against these fledglings ? As well turn Richard outright, and go and murder infant Princes in the Tower.

"Let them alone, Tom," I say apologetically.

"Oh, yes, sir, we'll let them alone, as we've let them alone every spring I can remember.

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And a fine lot of peas you'll be rearing by and by."

" Well, I sowed them twice as thick as need be, so that the birds could have one half."

" That was kind, sir—and by that token they've stolen half and half again, I'll warrant."

" Tom, I am going to see the new heifer," I put in, as a hint that the discussion may as well be closed.

Tom Lad, to do him justice, is quick to take a hint, and this morning he goes off to his work with a tranquil smile, as of one who has had the better of an argument. Perhaps this is the art of Arcady—to allow the last word, not to women only, but to the men you meet. Give them the sense that they are wise and skilled in fence; let them depart with the surety of victory; it is at once courteous and politic, and it saves one quite an appreciable amount of worry.

The new heifer—a beauty, red with a front of white—comes up to say good morning to me when I reach the fence, for we are friends already; and, after passing the gossip of the day with her and receiving a quantity of moist salutes, I stroll off to see if the trout are rising.

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On my way through the far pasture I meet Dick, the heir and scapegrace of the Styles establishment, wandering vaguely near the water's edge. He has a catapult in his hand, and the tail of a black ousel protrudes carelessly from his coat pocket ; yet for all that he looks Byronic almost in his gloom.

" Well, Dick, how is the mother this morning ? " I ask, as soon as I am within hailing distance.

Mrs. Styles, I should have mentioned, is soon to add to her happy-go-lucky family, and for a fortnight past she has been rather seriously ill.

" That's it," observes Dick, thrusting both his hands deep into his pockets. " She's been awfully ill, and everybody's fussing, and there's nothing worth eating in the house."

Dick is not a callous youth in the main, and he does not understand that there can be any serious danger in the case. I feel a strong sympathy with Dick, for every old woman, and most of the young ones, have been making daily pilgrimages to Mrs. Styles's house, after the curious fashion of women-kind when births or marriages or deaths are in the air. I comfort Dick as best I can, and he goes off in

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search of dinner; and I do not see him again until my return from an hour's fishing up Daisybank Brook. He is just coming out of the farmyard, and he looks gloomier than before.

"It's come," he says nonchalantly. "It's a girl." Then, with a burst of righteous anger, "Fancy all that trouble for nothing!"

I laugh immoderately. Only a boy could have made the epigram, but how many fathers have thought as much?

Dick is in earnest, however; he sees no cause for laughter, and eyes me with quiet distrust.

"And is mother getting better?" I venture.

"Oh, yes, the doctor says she'll do." A pause of quiet, unhappy thought. "The roan cow has calved, too," he adds—"and *that's* a girl calf."

Life clearly is too much for Dick just now; so I despatch him, with certain coins in his pocket, to buy a fishing-rod for which he had long yearned—in secret, as he thinks. It would not do to have Dick spoil a spring day by searching after the need for girl children in the world and the excuse for their existence.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF A MOTHER HEN.

NOT long after Dick's epigrammatic discussion of a certain topic—Mrs. Styles, indeed, is only just up and about again—a water-hen chooses to build her nest in the river, just beyond the boundary of my lawn. It is a ridiculous nest, in view of the close neighborhood of the village—just a house of straw and twigs, reared on a naked stone that stands above the stream, a few yards from the hither bank. The site is so open and inviting that no village lad, who was a lad at all, could resist taking advantage of it.

Mrs. Styles—who, like her husband, has a character peculiarly her own—comes to me with consternation on her face. She takes me to the waterside, and points out the nest with a gesture almost tragic.

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“Those lads!” she says. “Those awful lads—they wouldn’t be happy in Heaven, sir, for there isn’t a chance of mischief there.”

“I’m no theologian,” I answer mildly; “but who are the lads, and what have they done, Mrs. Styles?”

The good lady tosses her head—a wholesome, ruddy, sensible head—and eyes me wonderfully, as if sorrowful that I should have been born a man.

“Men’s like boys, sir, asking your pardon; they don’t rightly understand things. I’ve been a mother myself, sir, and I can guess what a poor bird feels like when she’s been robbed. Yond water-hen has been sitting patient-like, and she’s needed patience, for a colder spring I never knew. And now, just when she’s a right to look for her brood to come out, she’ll have the eggs taken.”

It was all very sad, of course, but I could see no way of helping the misguided mother-bird.

“What do you suggest, Mrs. Styles?” I asked.

“Well, I’ve been thinking. You can sit pheasants’ eggs under a hen, but a water-hen’s is littlish, an’ a big hen would scarce know

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they were under her. But there's th' little bantam, sir."

I laughed unthinkingly, much to Mrs. Styles's wrath.

"We have to do something," said she, screwing up her white and blue apron in one hand; "and maybe you won't laugh, sir, when you've seen the eggs come out."

"Try it, by all means," I hastened to put in. For I knew that look in the good woman's eye, and I feared it only a little less than her husband did.

I left her then, to go and hoe up a row of cabbages that sadly needed it; and while I was in the midst of work, Styles himself came into the kitchen garden in search of a rake. He stopped on seeing me, and pushed his hat back with a leisurely air.

"The missus has got a rare job on hand, sir," he said.

"Indeed?" I asked, not being disposed to admit collusion of any sort with Mrs. Styles's venture.

"Ay, she's going to be fearful clever. You mind the water-hen's nest out in the stream yonder? Well, she's taken the eggs, and put

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them under a bantam hen ; and, as I told her, we'll see them hatched when we see snow in August."

I knew quite well that Styles had not said this, but only thought of it ; Styles is full of repartee always when he is out of range of the wifely tongue which provokes it.

"And the hen is sitting all right ?" I asked.

"Bless ye, yes, sir, as snug as can be ; but she'll not sit long, if I know anything—it ain't in Nature she'll bring dabchicks out, when she was meant to rear bantams."

In my own mind I agreed with Tom Lad, but suggested that we would wait and see the issue. As the days wore on, Mrs. Styles grew more assured of mien ; for the bantam hen sat stolidly, and seemed to find no fault with the nature of the eggs beneath her.

"Seeing's believing, sir," she said to me, "though men folk have a trick, I've noticed, of doubting their own eyes."

At last I was interrupted at breakfast by the entry of Mrs. Styles.

"Oh, if you please, sir, the eggs are hatching out," she cried breathlessly.

I was infected with her own excitement, and

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left my kidneys to go cold. We crossed to the cozy henhouse on the riverside of the stable, and found the bantam visibly perturbed. Two of the fluffy youngsters were out of their shells, and the foster-mother was regarding them with a glance at once distrustful and surprised.

"Now, was I right, sir, or were you?" cried Mrs. Styles. "To be sure, their own mother—leastways, their foster-mother—doesn't seem to like the looks of them, but she'll come round to them by and by."

The bantam hen, however, did not "come round to them," as the sequel proved; she grew, if possible, more full of wonder than before. For water-chicks are quick to take to their own element, and within four-and-twenty hours of breaking the shell they will scent the water and be off to it. As it happened, I went with Mrs. Styles, late in the same day, to see how the youngsters were progressing; we found another chicken hatched, and its pair of elder brethren flapping disdainful wings at the newcomer.

"They'll do," said Mrs. Styles; "did you ever see such game young birds? And I'm

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glad, sir, I saved them from the boys, though you did have doubts."

As if to emphasize her praise, and give excuse for it, the two game youngsters flapped their wings afresh, glanced towards the open door, and flew straight as an arrow to the river.

"Well, that beats me!" cried Mrs. Styles, with lifted hands.

But her wonder was quite eclipsed by the wonder of the bantam hen. Here had she sat, day by day, upon what she considered to be honest eggs; and within four-and-twenty hours the first-born of her progeny had behaved as surely no self-respecting bantam chicks had yet behaved.

"Did you think they would hatch out chickens because a bantam sat on the eggs?" I asked, with quiet irony.

"No, sir, I didn't; but it would be seemlier-like if children were kinder to their parents. But there! What can you look for, when you've got railways, and incubators, and churning that work by steam?"

Mrs. Styles is, after all, a simple soul—as simple and unspoiled as God's winds, and

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moors, and streams, that were here before some misguided genius bethought him of the power of steam. We want more such folk as Mrs. Styles ; and I say it deliberately, not unmindful of the sharpness of her tongue.

The bantam hen has been a little subdued in manner since that episode of the strange progeny ; and even now, when another spring has come, and she has hatched a sitting of her own, I surprise just now and then a look of anxiety in her motherly eyes. She is not sure, in fact, of the honesty of any eggs, even of her own laying ; and the skepticism of the age has saddened, I fear, all her future days.

Yet Mrs. Styles, good woman, meant it for the best. She did not realize that Nature is mightier than ourselves, and that we cannot interfere with that law which is at once tender and ruthless, free-handed, and cruel to the point of savagery. The water-hen, in any case, was robbed of her eggs and left to sorrow ; the foster-mother was turned, in one day of harrowing experiences, into a skeptic with a saddened heart. Another spring has come, to her as to all of us, but she will never meet it with the same blithe gladness that she knew of yore ;

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the water-hen's broken heart, I fear, will ken no second spring again, though she will be unable to express herself, for her solace, in haunting Scotch verse.

Another spring has come ! How lightly the words slip off one's pencil, yet what a wealth of lyric poetry they hold ! The poetry is really lyric, too ; the first quavering thrush notes set the measure while yet the earth is black and the tree boughs show promise only by that glittering grayness of their bark which comes in February ; the very wind is lyric, as it flutes—with a shy warmth in it, as of a young girl's blush—through the answering twigs. Quietly, magically, the season grows in fulness and in grace. One morning—such things are epochs in the country—I find a crocus flaunting its yellow livery down by the orchard walk. A primrose follows, dewy-eyed and innocent of evil ; surely, when Nature halts to glance at the children she has born, she shows a mother's favoritism towards this gentle bloom ; surely the primrose is the first among her girls.

Then the trees begin to burgeon ; the elderberry first, and then the hawthorn, and after them the chestnut buds wax big and resinous.

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The days seem to pass so quickly at this season ; it is the time of action, and action is always swift when a long waiting time has gone before. Scarcely have the lilacs unfolded their leaves, the laburnums spread their lacy greenery in the wind, than we are here, full in the midst of spring. The copper-beech glows ruddy against the sky—a sky of blue, with cloudlets strung like pearls across her breast. The lilac, white and purple, lives neighbor to the tasseled gold drops of laburnum. In the woodland, bordering the sunk fence, unsuspected green stuff comes to birth—hyacinth and shepherd's purse, lords and ladies, foxgloves, and the cool, green grasses. The peonies—flowers of lang syne, that link us with the sinless days of youth—are breaking into blossom on every bed. Now, too, the London Pride is rearing its head, with the air of homespun dignity that is its charm, and double daisies are showing where the ladslove and the lavender are putting out their leaves.

Spring is icomen in ! There's no music in the language like to those four words. Birds are mating, or are nesting; birds are singing Burns-like love-songs to their mates, and Nature

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croons her cradle-song above the green things
and the feathered that she loves.

This is the flower aspect of spring. As I have said, the flowers were given us for soul-refreshment, to be enjoyed without need of labor. But what of the kitchen garden? It is no time for dawdling, once we are within those red brick walls—a colony of lettuces and peas, of beans and celery and smooth-cheeked potatoes. The early cabbages are showing heart, to be sure; the first sowing of broad beans is pushing sturdily through the soil; but the peas are troubling me.

With peas, as with every other vegetable, the wise men differ. I am by way of distrusting my own judgment, and like to consult the village specialists. Apart from Tom Lad—who is warped in his views of my kitchen garden, though in all else he is singularly free of jealousy—there are many such prophets amongst us, here in the quiet village by the river. Two men out of every three have some sort of allotment—the Squire happens to be warm-hearted and enlightened—and each of my gardening friends has views that nothing but the impact of a wandering planet would crush. Timothy

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Brailes, for instance, a good cobbler and a reasonably good gardener, dropped in a few weeks ago while I was sowing my earliest row of peas; he had ostensibly brought back a pair of fishing-boots which had been to him for repairs, and after delivering the same he had slipped, according to old habit, into my red-walled sanctum.

“Sowing peas, are you?” said he, with a jerk of his lame leg.

“It looks like it, Tim.”

“Well, you’re making a mistake. What’s the use of sowing now? Bide till the back-end of the month, and they’ll come up faster—ay, and be stronger, too. I always said it was no use sowing early up i’ these cold parts; it isn’t the same as if we were dwelling London-way.”

“I’ll risk it, Timothy,” I said, as I finished the sowing and began to dust the seed with soot.

“Well, it’s you that is growing them, not me; but I don’t like, and never did like, to see a lot of good seed wasted. You’re sowing twice too thick, sir, too.”

Timothy touched me on the raw here, for it

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is this question of the right thickness of sowing which unsettles one the most. As in politics some men can be Radical or Tory under all stress of party weather, so there are gardeners who hold their own settled views, and glory in them, and are not troubled by any chance waves of criticism ; but, for my part, I pride myself upon an open mind, and try to follow the philosophical, sane method of sifting out the wheat from the chaff of men's advice. The result is that I wobble—indeed, the result of all philosophical methods would appear to be the same. Sometimes I sow too thinly, and the row comes up ragged as a six-days' beard ; again, in a fit of violent reaction, I strew the seed so thickly that, instead of an orderly row of peas, I have a dark, primeval forest. This year, however, I had studiously sought the golden mean, and Timothy's disparagement seemed hard—the more so, inasmuch as I began to feel the old vague doubt of my own wisdom.

“I'll risk it,” I repeated, with a snappishness that seemed to cheer the heart of Timothy Brailes.

“Waste not, want not, I was always told,”

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he went on imperturbably, "and that holds especially of sowing pea seed."

Tom Lad, as it chanced, came into the garden at the moment, and after a jovial nod to Timothy, he stood and looked down my row of seeds.

"Too thin by the half, and you're sowing a fortnight late, sir, if you want peas before Michaelmas."

"Thank you, Tom," I rejoined, as I began to cover up the trench, "you can settle the matter with Timothy yonder."

I was tranquil once again ; it was pleasant to think that I was no longer a target for criticism, but that I could stand by while these heroes waged their battle. And fight they did, until Tom Lad was moved at last to cry, "Get thee back to thy leather, Timothy, for it's plain that cobbling is *thy* trade."

Meanwhile I had covered up my trench, and the next was ready for manuring ; I was for once the practical man, while these men of their hands were wasting time in windy talk.

I was interrupted in my quiet enjoyment of the situation by Mrs. Styles.

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"If you please, sir, there's the Squire here, and Miss Cathy," she said, with that indescribable air of aloofness which she wears whenever the Babe honors me with a visit; though why she should exhibit those odd moods, I cannot tell, in view of her undoubted partiality for the child.

I glanced down at my gardening clothes, and at my boots; there are disadvantages at times in being at once a gardener and a host. Surely the feeling is a stupid one, for a man is honored by his toil—yet, somehow, as I come face to face with Cathy on the lawn—Cathy, all wonderful in some dainty stuff of white and saffron—I feel less the dignity of toil than the absurdity of my raiment.

"Oh, in corduroys, my boy?" cries the Squire, with his jolly laugh. "Cathy, we must interrupt this serious being—you know how very serious he always is in corduroys."

It pleases the Squire to make light of my gardening; indeed, he says I am a better shot than a cabbage-grower; but then I laugh at my gardening myself at times, and so do not take raillery to heart.

"Murphy thinks that corduroys suit him,

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Dad," puts in the Babe, "and I half believe they do."

"Babe, you should not talk nonsense," I begin.

"Then, sir, I shall have to be dumb, for father tells me that I never talk anything else."

"Come for a ride this afternoon, and send your bag up to the Hall," the Squire interrupts. "Cathy has some people coming unexpectedly to dinner, and you are such a good soul in helping one through terrors of that kind."

"Quiet for harness or saddle," I suggest; "the gentlest lady can drive him to the dinner table."

"Murphy, you are flippant!" cries the Babe; "and you oughtn't to be flippant in corduroys."

I accept the invitation—I always do accept the Squire's invitations if it is any way possible—and stroll with them, according to old habit, as far as the Bridge of Amity.

"Till two-thirty this afternoon, then," says the Squire at parting. "I'll pick you up on the way. And, I say, boy," he adds with another laugh, "you won't be getting up on a

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tub on the village green, will you, and denounce me as a plutocrat? I never feel sure of you when you have soil on your hands (and face, I should add). Good-by, boy; be a son of toil, if you like, but don't, for mercy's sake, become horny-handed—politically, you know!"

This is a very old jest of the Squire's; but jests in Arcady grow old in bottle, and we relish them the more!

An odd recollection comes to me, after I have left them at the bridge and seen the last of Cathy's white and saffron raiment; the recollection dates back to those golden days—how soon they perish!—when I felt myself a person of importance, with splendid futures waiting on my pleasure, each anxious I should make my choice. Perhaps I was fifteen, perhaps sixteen; at any rate, I remember that my cricket average at Winchester that summer was 38.11, and I felt it was time to secure a wife at once on the strength of fame so great. Cathy was eleven then; we had shared escapades of many kinds ever since she was able to leave her cradle in search of mischief; and now, looking down on her from the height of my manhood—a manhood crowned with an average of 38.11 for

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twelve completed innings—I decided that she “would do.” I recall, too, a kind of King Cophetua feeling, a sense of condescending charity, when I asked her, one moonlit night when she had come to watch me ferreting for rabbits, if she would marry me as soon as she had grown big. She said “yes” at once—of course, I had not doubted it—and I went home with a dim, heroic feeling that I must soon begin to shave. An engaged man ought to *have* to shave; it was ridiculous not to shave, if you were looking forward to the responsibilities of marriage.

Somehow, though, Cathy took a long time to “grow big;” and by and by, when the awful dignity of razors, and tobacco, and a freshman’s gown, came to me in due course, I forgot that little incident in the rabbit warren. I found ideas, and cultivated them; whether I should startle the world by producing the most brilliant epic ever penned, or whether I should merely attain distinction at the Bar and pass in due course to the woolsack, was a detail to be settled later; meanwhile, there was the river and the cricket field, and it seemed quite enough for the present to row

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two in the May boat. I saw a good deal of Cathy when I was home for the vacations, and she was plainly awed by my new dignity; once or twice she confided to me, in a burst of wrath, that Cambridge was a "horrid little town," and that she wished I were just the cat-hunting, tree-climbing boy she used to know, with a rabbitty smell about my coat and the nose of a ferret peeping out of my pocket. I felt cheered by this palpable acknowledgment of my regeneration, and grew even more particular as to my collars. As for being bound by a boy's love-vow—I shrugged my shoulders when I thought of it, and lit a pipe, and fixed my thoughts upon the brilliant future.

Yet the brilliant future never arrived, for some reason. When I had taken my degree, and the time had come to make a choice, I heard the old fathers whispering in my ear. Why kill one's self with London smoke and London restlessness, even to be made Lord Chancellor? And few of us are made Lords Chancellor. The real things of life were in the country, awaiting me with a surer welcome than any fame could give. Why should I not

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ride hard, and fish, and shoot, and cultivate fine, unworkable theories on the rearing of crops, just as my forebears had done before me? As for the epic—well, surely there were plenty of folk to startle the world, and it seemed a poor amusement, after all. So after a year or two of travel, to shake a little of my youthfulness out of me, it was borne in on me that I was quite a usual person, that I couldn't do any of the mighty things which I had thought so simple of achievement; and I began to enjoy life again. It is a sad, distressing period, this of dawning manhood—just how distressing we never learn until we have cast the slough and feel the new, clean skin begin to fit us.

Imperceptibly I dropped into the ways of Arcady; and imperceptibly I renewed acquaintance with Cathy. If she had been slow to "grow big," she was atoning for it now with disquieting energy. I began to grow afraid of Cathy—I, who had bullied and patronized her—for there seemed no likely finish to her development. When first I settled down here, to found the great family whose heads are Tom Lad and his wife, whose

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branches are the Alderneys and goats and pigs and cabbages, the child was a real girl-child, reedy and shy, with eyes that seemed too big for the inquiring face ; then, on the sudden—it seemed to be done like a conjuring trick, as deftly and as speedily—she became a maiden, shy yet, but with a sweet serenity, and with a little air, at times, of watching me from some starry height forbidden to us ordinary folk. It was absurd to be afraid of Cathy ; but not all my memories of youthful days, when I came to her with the awful majesty of boyhood meeting girlhood, could drive out that growing fear.

Now we have settled down, Cathy and I and my fears. She is forgetting to walk with the accredited goddess-stride, and is becoming more like the Cathy of an older day—an eager Cathy, quick to learn the way of making a fly and throwing it, ambitious to do, and do well, the things that sportsmen do. It is very pleasant, now that we have really overcome the difficulties incidental to the child's growth ; she is just a child to me again, and the jolliest comrade one could have.

Yet why should I recall that little scene in

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**the rabbit warren ? Why should I remember,
just to-night, how we plighted troth and how
softly she nestled against my rabbit-perfumed
coat ? Only to laugh at boyish folly, surely.
I did not realize, in those untutored days,
how safe a harborage is bachelordom.**

CHAPTER V

INTRODUCES A CHEERFUL VAGRANT.

I WAS smoking quietly on the lawn this evening, after a hard day's gardening, and thinking of the Babe's dinner-party last night —a pleasant one, but not half so pleasant as when none but our three selves were present—and I was looking out on the far line of trees, which caught the sunset fires upon their leaves, when a dark figure came suddenly within my line of view. The figure stopped on seeing me, hesitated, then advanced; and I saw, as my visitor came nearer, that he had a quizzical, well-shaven face, an easy gait that was half-way between a dawdle and a slouch, a coat that had seen wear. He came to a halt in front of the garden-seat and saluted me impressively.

"Good evening, sir," said he, in a mellow voice that took my fancy at the first.

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"Good evening," I answered; "are you seeking me?"

"I am taking a liberty, sir. I was passing by the hedge yonder, wondering how I should earn bite and sup for the wife and little ones; and I saw you, sir, and I said to myself, 'Here's a kind face.'"

I saw then that he had a lie to unfold, and I was rather in the humor for a well-told lie.

"I'm a little tired of my own kindness," I put in; "whenever I am credited with a kind face or a kind heart it means so much out of pocket."

"I hope so, sir," he said, unblushingly.

"Well now, my friend, sit down, and fill your pipe. Don't ask me to believe your tale; but if it will ease your mind to tell it—"

"It will, sir!" he broke in. "Perhaps I look a devil-may-care sort of chap, and perhaps you wouldn't think it in me to be sorry for a wife and bairns; but looks are poor things to go by."

"Of course they are. Does that 'baccy suit you?"

"Fine, sir, thank you. I'm a big smoker—

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when I can get it ; though I'm no way given to drink."

He excused himself prematurely, and I was satisfied that drink was his great failing. Still, it was pleasant to listen to that deep, rolling voice of his, and romances are better reading from the life than from the printed book.

"Times are hard, sir, for honest men, who only seek an honest wage for the day's work," he went on. "I left the wife and children in the village; they've had nothing to eat for two days, poor things, and they can't stay an empty stomach with 'baccy, as we can. Something told me, sir, that I should find a friend here if I went seeking him, and I believe in following Providence when she gives you a lead."

This was a creditable touch. Fearing to spoil the assured flow of his fancy, I looked as foolish and confiding as a benevolent country gentleman need do, and gently prompted him. He elaborated his story, giving details of the "little lass who was like a bit of sunshine on a gloomy road." It was remarkably well done, and my heart warmed to the old scoundrel; this was his trade, and I like a man to be good

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at the occupation he has chosen. One thing puzzled me; he spoke as an educated man would—an educated man who had long ceased to mix with his equals; and, more than that, he used phrases here and there which palpably belonged to the shibboleth of the wealthier classes.

"You see, sir, I was not always like this," he said, presently, *& propos* of nothing. "It might surprise you to know that I rowed stroke in the Light Blue boat more years ago than I care to remember!"

He was speaking the truth now; the smoothness had gone from his voice, the crafty look from the eyes, the too-watchful rendering of a well-conned part. To make sure of him, I plied him with a few careless questions.

"I'm Cambridge, too," I said. "Where were you?"

"Hall. And you?"

I named my college, and afterwards, little by little, I drew enough from him to make quite sure that, in one thing at least, he had spoken the truth, And strange it was to sit here with this out-at-elbows fellow, a fellow 'Varsity man, and to think that, but for certain accidents of

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temperament, we might be tramping the road together fellows in adversity. We had a long chat after this, till suddenly he remembered his cue, and pelted me again with the wife and little ones. I gave him something rather handsome, and a handshake with it; and he departed, the tears standing thick in his fine, wicked eyes as he vowed that all, all should go to the good wife, who would bless me.

Tom Lad, when I gave him certain orders some two hours later, eyed me with sardonic glee.

"Seems you had a visitor to-night, sir," he said.

"Yes; a queer one. What do you think of him?" Quickly as news travels in the village, I was not quite prepared for this.

"Nay, I happened to drop in at the inn to see a chap about a ferret he wants to sell; and while we were having a glass of ale together a what you might call a better class sort of tramp comes in and sits him down at the table in the corner."

"Ah, that must be my friend with the wife and children. So he went to the inn, did he?"

Tom smiles in a ruminative way. "I knew

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it must be you, sir," he says, quietly. "Ay, he was there, as grave as an owlet; and the first thing he does after settling himself, is to set an empty ale jug fair in the middle of the table; then he sets three mugs on one side o' th' jug and three to t'other, and he looks at us.

" 'See how carefully I tend the wife and little ones,' says he, in his gentleman sort of voice. 'The jug here is my wife—a good wife, friends, but empty, sadly empty at times—and these mugs are my six little children ; plain children, but honest ones and homely, gentlemen.'

" We gives a great laugh at that, but the stranger never moves a muscle. He lays down a crown piece, and nods to the landlord.

" ' Host,' says he, ' I accepted the crown piece just now as a loan from my friend who lives at the lane-foot yonder—as a loan, you understand—because my wife and bairns were going empty. I promised that my first step should be to fill them, and I was ever a man of my word. Fill the family, host.' So then the landlord, laughing till the fat on him rolled up and down, filled up the lot, and our merry gentleman began to drink."

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"Did he get through it creditably?" I put in.

"Didn't he! I never saw the like; he just *walked* through his liquor, and when he'd done he called for more. 'They're starving, host,' says he, pointing to the mugs; 'remember they have been for long in poverty, and I'm a faithful husband and father, and—yes, by my buttons they shall have the whole of that crown piece; I'll keep nothing for myself.' Well, I left him, sir, a-sitting with the beer afore him, and telling tales that would make a Quaker grin; and I thought as I came down the lane I'd just let you know where stray crown pieces go."

I smile at Tom Lad in a gentle, fatherly way; he has not yet attained that ripe philosophy which can give money to a rogue and willingly allow him the privilege of spending it at his will. Some day I hope to meet my friend again—say, in some lonely tavern, when I find myself benighted, and seek a comrade who can while the winter's evening away. But not even to Tom Lad do I confess that it was more—much more—than a crown piece which I gave to my fellow in distress.

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"Well, he amused me for an hour, and I paid him for it. I never met a better liar, Tom."

"And so you knew he was lying? That makes it worse, if I may make so bold, sir; and I'm sure, what with thieving lads, and tramps, and weather fit to make the crops creep underground again, there'll beggary come on us—ay, it will come, sure enough. Shoot 'em off, sir, all these skulking chaps; they're growing over-thick about the place."

"I only hold a game license, Tom," I put in, mildly. "A tramp license costs much more!"

"That's a pity, sir. And yet, for the life of me, I can't help laughing when I think of yon chap's face. He gets a big mug before him, and 'That's my wife,' says he; and then he sets a lot of little mugs all round it, and 'That's my crying bairns,' says he; and then he starts and tells us tales—by th' Heart, I thought we should have died with laughing."

So Tom Lad, after all, despite the beggary which he foresees daily on some count or other, had found a use for this genial liar with the wife and children. A drunkard my friend

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was, a drunkard he must be, though all the forces of regeneration come to save him ; surely it is something, then, that he should be witty, quick of fancy, able to go daily on his roguish way, not with groans and lamentations, but with a heart that will be merry in spite of all.

He is an extreme case, of course, not only in his antecedents, but in the self-evident character of his romances. Other cases there are, which come to me time and time, when I cannot judge between truth and falsehood. I generally give, I own, and I am certainly more often taken in than otherwise. And yet, away at the back of my conscience, or my heart, or my instinct—call it what you will—there is a voice which whispers quite unworldly counsel. It tells me, this voice which is cool and very quiet, that it is better to be befooled a score of times than to pass one true man by. Suppose you shut the door on sympathy—call it sentiment, if you will—and printed “ No ” upon your heart in graven characters, and would not suffer your pride to be lowered by being “ taken in ” ? Well, you would send one man away just every now and then whose heart was

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sick with striving after honest labor, whose little ones did really call him with voices that were piercing to his ear. I dare not risk it, that is all. Let the wastrels come and drown my charity in beer, and get from it what content a poor life has to offer them ; let them laugh at me for credulity, if it pleases them—for there is the true man speaking to me, the true man who has taken a little from my excess, and who, may be, has found a new lease of life and hope and happiness.

It is distressing economy, all this ; but somehow in life folk do not live by text-books, and lack of bread is a thing which hurts one even to think of. Lack of bread ? Yes, surely it is a risk, an awful risk to let one stranger go his way unbenisoned.

There are odd side-paths in men's characters, and this very question of charity serves often to guide us to them. I have a neighbor—a rough, purse-proud fellow, who has retired on a fortune more or less well earned. He is loud in his denunciation of the beggar and the tramp ; it is vain to tell him that a vagrant is born, not made, and that your charity cannot create a character which, like the poet's, is

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given at birth ; you cannot make him see that, so long as you are robbing no one but yourself, you are at liberty to make even the sinners happy for the little moment. Yet I met this same man the other day—I came on him rather sharply round the corner of a lane—and found him distributing pennies among a little knot of children. He blushed on seeing me, and packed the children off, and faced me half defiantly.

“ Well, my friend ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, it’s nothing,” he replied, shamefacedly. “ Who wouldn’t make the children happy, if he could ? ”

And yet we are all of us children, big or little ; and the grown man, with his heart in his boots and his manhood left, perchance, in jail, can feel a pleasure out of all proportion to the cause if you give him the contents of your pouch or the price of a long drink. Perhaps there is some warp in my nature that compels me to feel fellowship for the outcast and the rogue ; at any rate, I have found them vastly more entertaining, and in some ways far more liberal minded, than we who walk the decent roads of life. They are nearer to the

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**brutes, nearer to the sky that shelters them
through many a night, nearer to the comely
face of Nature, who knows no broadcloth
morals.**

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING COW-SPEECH AND OTHER LANGUAGES.

I DON'T think that one is blind to certain weaknesses attaching to this life of ours in Arcady. It is a narrow sphere, to begin with; but then the widest spheres in the world—those of the Empire Builders and the Empire Rhymesters and the Empire Grocers—are narrowed, just as the laborer's is who tills another's land, by the necessities of human endurance, human sorrow lightened by a little joy, human need of forbearance and of charity. Our cages do not vary very much, though sometimes they are painted in brighter colors that attract the notice of the passer-by. Rome, when once you have found it, becomes a sphere as narrow as the strip of land from which the back-bowed farmer gains, by his year-long, life-long battle, his sense of worthiness to hold

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his head among his fellows in the market-place ; and Alexander, sighing for fresh worlds to conquer, is the highest type of warning to those who talk too lightly of narrowness and breadth.

Then—let it be admitted, since arguments in Arcady are addressed only to the truth—the life here is apt to foster a regard for detail, a searching for the little signs of growth, a speculative outlook on the theory that all developments of human life are equally important. Yet, after all, are we sure that our human dramas, longer and more full of stage-craft though they be, are a whit nearer to the essential things of drama than the plays of our furred and feathered brethren ?

Have not the birds their comedies and love tragedies, as vital as our own ? The hen-blackbird, sitting dreamily yonder on her bough, may very well be Beatrice to some Dante of the ousel-world ; he may be watching her—another's mate—from under shelter of the neighboring lime tree, and in the next year's Spring-song he may find a gush of poetry, true, spirited and undefiled, to which we shall listen, you and I, at the hour of deepening night ;

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and we shall wonder at the sweetness of the song, not understanding that a second Divine Comedy is being composed within our modest precincts—yea, sung, moreover, by its author. Such conceits may be fanciful; but this is certain, that the lives of dumb things offer, to one who lives in closest touch with them, more points of contact with our own than seems at first sight to be credible. Why does one use that foolish phrase, “the dumb things”? It has no meaning. No four-footed thing is dumb, no feathered libertine is dumb who is privileged to divide his leisure between Heaven and the fruitful earth; nay, the grasshopper has his own language, a sprightly one, and the tree-branches have a deep power of speech—folk-songs of tragedy, when the winter gale rips through them, love-tales of Arcady, when the summer breeze stirs drowsily through the leafage. What if their vowel-sounds are not our own, and their words are not to be interpreted by strangers visiting their country? Are they dumb, therefore, and shall we, with that insular, persistent prejudice which is our strength, dismiss Turks and Arabs and the Chinaman with the same easy phrase? These,

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too, are dumb, if we are to name all dumb whose language we have failed to understand.

Sometimes, when there is a smell of hay-time in the air, when kine are lowing and we seem to scent the fragrance of their breath, it is hard to believe that the cow-speech is not in some ways richer than our own ; it is so deep, so mellow, so full of that mingled gladness and pathetic protest which makes the sum of life's expression. The corn-crake, too, voicing his sorrow in the growing meads—the rook, with his old-man's rendering of tales which he has culled from the lives of the best families; the beetle, droning a drowsy song, half of revelry and half of the sleep that follows ; the bee, who sings a sober, Watts-like hymn of toil and quiet content ; the starling's note of gossip, or of scandal possibly ; the curlew's wail above the waste, compelling loneliness of heath and bog —these are voices that speak to us in living words. And you, my friend the poet, and I—would we not give some years of life to sing as the throstle does, when Spring has spread her leafy fans and all the underwood is cool with the waving of the same ?

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The question of speech is an enticing one, if we approach it seriously and with an open mind. Oral speech, regarded philosophically, seems to become of the least, not of the first, importance; it is a clumsy expedient, for which the other animals, I suspect, pity us with a kind of friendly, half-contemptuous compassion. The highest form of speech that the world knows, perhaps—using speech in the broad sense of a something which puts two understandings in communion one with the other—is that which holds between a horse and the master who was born to ride him. Those four strips of leather called the reins, the fingers holding them—what power there is in the contact to make a horse's instinct and the man's instinct move like bits of some well-ordered mechanism. A touch of the reins, a pressure of the knees, can express more than a month of mere talk could do; there is, moreover, no clumsy halt, such as must lie between the spoken word and its reception by the brain of one's companion; the language is instinct's, and touch of the rein and its acknowledgment seem one in action, not separated any way by time. Imagine for a moment the accidents

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that would occur, say three times a day at least, to every hunting man if his good beast had to wait for oral speech at every crisis; quick judgment is the rider's elementary need; but it would be useless if the horse could not interpret on the instant what the least finger-ing of the reins implies.

Then, too, horse understands horse, dog comprehends dog, though an Arab meet a Yorkshire hackney, or a hound from the far Russian Steppes foregathers with an Irish terrier. With men it is otherwise; and, while we are making humorous efforts to establish some stolid sort of Volapük among all races, the animals we name dumb have enjoyed a universal language since the beginning of their species.

Another odd fact is brought home to one time and time. The beasts are far more courteous toward ignorance than are we. Should a foreigner stumble against our idioms, our pronunciation, we laugh at him; but do the dogs and horses laugh at us when we make our first attempts to learn their speech? Nothing is more instructive in its way, perhaps, than the behavior of a horse newly bought,

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whose ways are strange to one, whose temper and whole outlook upon life await our better acquaintance. We make mistakes, with bit and curb ; we try sternness when this particular beast needs tenderness, and we humor his caprice when he knows quite well it is better for his morals that he should be thwarted ; yet he bears with us with a patient courtesy that is beyond all praise. Now and then he will look round at one, with big, inquiring eyes, as if in wonder at our dulness ; but he accommodates himself as well as may be, and waits, and trusts that by and by we shall attain his own priceless gift of instinct. With dogs it is the same ; they come and talk to you in an open, undissembling way, and persevere if your smell is an honest one and a grateful ; if you have no doggy corner in your heart they will not trouble you for long, but if you have they will go forward, patiently and uncomplainingly, with the labor of teaching you their speech. Unpaid professors of the nobler tongues, what care you take for us, while exponents of our human languages draw goodly stipends for perpetuating our follies !

So, after all, this so-called narrowness of life

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in Arcady is wide, perhaps, as the stars that look on us with softened eyes by night. Look with the seeing eye—in imitation of the stars—and wonderland is here before you; your pipers and your minstrels are addressed to sing you songs of Araby or of far Cathay, or—of home, which songs are best of all; and by and by, when you are tired of pageant and of song, you shall watch the intimate, stern things of destiny that press upon the insect and the bird, the minnow and the hedge-mouse and the growing crops—press as surely as they press upon ourselves.

Nor is one's life here, if one comes to view it quietly, lacking in human interest, however much Arcadian birds and beasts are apt to claim one's leisure. One village, surely, holds all essential types of men, and the great tragedies and great comedies of human life are in progress here as actively as in the towns—with this difference, that the town scene is too crowded to admit of our giving special study to the one man or the one woman, while here the long years of intimacy take us to the bed-rock of our neighbor's nature.

Ay, there are tragedies and comedies enough

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in the quiet village that borders upon Arcady ; yet this morning, because the day is heartsome and the bees are murmuring in the lime tree overhead as I scribble, I am minded to think only of the comedy of human nature—a comedy which has no limits. There are two gray-beards living in our midst, for instance, who have been friends from boyhood, who have worked together in their prime, who have retired together to enjoy a well-earned rest in the gloaming of their days. Evening after evening in summer-time you would see them sitting, with pipe and glass for company, on the bench in front of the tavern ; with great and serious amity they decided questions of State and Church, questions of village politics or gossip ; and all was very well with them until a certain day, when one of the pair announced, in full company, that he was the oldest man in the parish ; the boast was repeated in due course to his brother-ancient, whose face was serious when they foregathered that evening on their accustomed bench.

“ John,” he begins, turning to his comrade, “ they tell me you’ve been talking foolish-like.”

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“ How might that be, James?”

“ By saying you’re the oldest man in the parish.”

James’s attitude grows stiffer on the sudden.
“ And so I am, James, so I am.”

“ Fiddle o’ that tale! Why, I count you a bit of a youngster, John, and always shall do, when set beside myself. Nay, nay, we’ve been good friends, but we shall fratch, lad, if you set yourself up to be an old, ancient man like myself.”

“ Fratch away, James,” the other puts in, with rising bitterness. “ I was born i’ th’ same year as Lord John Russell, and Waterloo, and Admiral Nelson, for I’ve heard my mother say it was queerish to see four such big things happen i’ one year.”

James shows growing temper, too, but he attempts, as the better informed of the two, to cloak it under irony.

“ You did well to be born so oft,” he says; “ ay, it was a cleverish thing to compass, John. I know naught so much about your Lord John Russell, but I know that Admiral Nelson was dead as a salted herring before Waterloo was fought.”

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"That makes no sort o' difference to my age," the other observes, uneasily.

"Well, what is your age, then? Do you reckon by Waterloo?"

"Ay, I stand by Waterloo. Ay, to be sure, I was born the very night the news came up that Boney had been thrashed."

"You'll stick to that, John?"

John, hazy as to the exact number of his years, though sure that they come to a good round sum, is glad of this apparently solid ground. He does not understand the craft and subtlety of his opponent.

"Well, then, I told you you were just a lad compared with me, for I was almost old enough to fight myself at Waterloo, while you were being rocked in the cradle."

John gets to his feet, and his face is quiet and firm. "See, you, James, we've been friendly, man and boy, and I wouldn't say aught against you, for I've liked you well; all I say is, if any man, choose who he be, says I've fewer years to my back than you, he's a liar."

The oratory is almost parliamentary at the finish, but then, John is deeply moved.

"That'll do, John," the other responds, rising,

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with equal dignity. "I say it, and I stick to it, and anybody in the parish is free to hear me say so."

Comedy? Yes, so far. But the sequel is pathetic. Since that scene, six months ago, the quarrel has grown deep and bitter; these two, so near the grave, so sadly in need of that amity and mutual forbearance which lends its own color to old age, are sundered by a trivial argument as to which is nearer to the grave. The pleasant pipe and glass are no longer shared in common, and each goes sadly on his way.

What is this itch of old men to seem older still? Here, again, as in so many points, extreme youth and age are at one in wishing to be first in some one thing, if only in laying claim to patriarchal age; perhaps it is the outcome of a curious pride that they can survive the allotted span of six-score years and ten, while other men so seldom reach it, and from this standpoint each added year is a fresh token of their prowess. At any rate, the feeling seems deep-seated in old people, and John and James are making tragedy of what should be food for the comic muse alone.

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Some day I have dreams of proving to these two that they were born in the same year, on the same day, at the same hour. I should not mind a little stretching of forensic logic, if by this means I could insure that peace with honor would crown the brief remainder of their days. I miss those ancient figures on the bench outside the tavern ; yes, surely they must soon be reconciled, and the village take again its accustomed air.

It is a many-sided topic, this of old age. No man has more chance of winning dignity, sublimity even, than the graybeard who has lived well and knows the true way of going down a hill. He has seen more than we youngsters have, has felt more, has, above all, secured the priceless gift of seeing life in perspective, as a man may view a country-side from some high, untroubled hill; he is full of the faith of his days, and God seems near to him almost as a brother ; he has a charm of courtesy that can grow to ripeness only by long sunshine of kindness and honor and true dealing with his fellows ; it is the old men chiefly who convince us of our lack of worthiness. Yet all our elders are not so ; there are

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those who carry their pack of mis-spent deeds, and who long to lay their burden down ; there are those who have done neither well nor ill in life, and who carry no more meaning than the face of a stagnant pool ; there are those—the saddest, surely, of them all—who are too tired to carry their years. These last may have fine exploits behind them, may have been faithful to their single talent or their many, may have enjoyed an interval of that well-earned rest which in itself is luxury ; yet now they are past all feeling, past all enjoyment of rest or of that voice of Memory which is as a lute's song, soft, quiet, persuasive ; they are simply tired, and, like poor Flick, my terrier, their eyes ask weary questions when you meet them.

One man of this last sad sort I have in mind. He is younger than the ancients who still have heart to pick a quarrel with each other ; but at heart he is older by a generation. Nothing moves him now ; I see him sometimes in the lanes—say, when a lad and lass go past and flaunt their hot young passion in the world's face—and he will stand, his hands upon his gnarled and stunted hazel-stick, and watch

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them out of sight. You can read in his dim eyes that he is wondering—just wondering. Years ago, even when such matters had already passed beyond his present scope, he could look on, and wink, and nod his head, and take a quiet gladness from remembrance of the days when he wooed Susan of the ripe brown eyes ; but now he is past remembrance, which should be man's flower-softened path to his last resting-place.

I came upon him in just such a scene, at just such a moment. The laughter of the rustic wooers was in our ears ; the old man turned upon his stick, after they had disappeared among the trees, and his face, so far as expression of any sort was left it, was pitiful.

“ It’s just here,” he said, very quietly. “ God has forgotten me, sir. I’m old—too old by half—and God has forgotten to take me away.”

There was no denying it ; unlettered, rude, this man had, from the crucible of life, plucked out the burning words that in themselves were truth. God had forgotten him ! Ay, poor waif ; he rested and was still, not as one enjoying leisure, but as a fallen oak tree rests, wait-

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ing for its bark to rot, its goodly timber to fall into dust, asking only that wind and weather, ants and beetles, and bark-loving conies shall quickly do their work. Well, surely, he shall die; and in that surety is the only gladness one can find in thinking of the man who has lived too long.

“Scribbling again, Murphy?”

It is Cathy’s voice, of course. No one but the Babe ever calls me Murphy, and it needs all those tones of amber and rich sunshine which lie in Cathy’s voice to reconcile me to the name. Alas, that an early passion for baked potatoes should bear fruit so late in life!

I look up slowly, for, truth to tell, I cannot rid myself at once of the thought of that sad old man who told me, only this morning, that God had forgotten him.

“Scribbling? Oh, yes,” I answer, vaguely.

“What are you going to do with those wonderful bits of paper, Murphy?”

“Burn them, probably.”

“Oh, no. They must be worth something, if they can make you”—she sighs in a queer way—“make you not know that friends are

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near until—until, Murphy, they almost have to tread on your toes to rouse you."

"Babe, your logic is weak, as it always is. The more absorbed a man is in his pencil and paper the more foolish he must be; the people who do wonderful things on paper don't get absorbed—they simply write, then go and have lunch."

"Murphy, you will please not laugh at me. It—it hurts me—and—and you are not at your best, you know, when you are trying to be witty. I came to tell you that the Blue Andalusian—Betty, you know—has swellings about the eyes and ears, and she doesn't seem able to breathe with comfort, and she doesn't even try to eat. Murphy, I couldn't bear to lose that hen; she has such good blood in her veins."

"It may be thrush," I put in, solemnly; "it may even be canker, Babe."

"Oh, please come and see her at once; you do know something about hens, don't you, Murphy?"

"Tom Lad says I know nothing, but he may be wrong. Shall I come and do my best for Betty?"

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Together we go across the lawn, and halt for a moment on that Bridge of Amity which is so ridiculously suggestive of the sentiment which was responsible for it. The water underneath flows quietly as a dream ; a trout, as usual, is stirring lazy fins between the waterweeds ; Betty, the hen, may be ailing unto death ; yet, somehow, I have forgotten her. How bonnie this child looks, with the wind among her hair and the rose-blush on her cheeks—how she has grown, to be sure, since the days, so near and yet so very far away, when her frocks were shorter by many inches—what a pity if she should ever seriously “grow up,” and decide that we could no longer, with propriety, consult each other on every conceivable occasion as to the ailments of our animals, the merits of a new fishing-fly, the intricacies of bee-keeping.

“What are you thinking of, Cathy?” I ask, after a silence broken only by the splash of a rat among the watered alder-roots.

“I?” She lifts her face, and the eyes—such steady, truthful eyes the Babe has—are full of shyness and surprise. “Well, you see, Murphy, when you look at the water and begin to wonder how much of it has passed underneath the

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bridge—and one has *done nothing* all the time—and then one gets quite old, you know, and more and more water seems to pass every minute."

I laugh aloud, in sheer gratitude for the Babe's comedy. This thing of sunlight and free air, this child with youth about her like a glory and the joy of innocence in every ripening curve of face and form—how could she ever grow "quite old," or even partially so?

"You need not laugh, Murphy," she assures me, in an aggrieved voice; "it all seems very serious when one is seventeen and begins to understand how quickly the water slips under the bridge."

"Yes, it must seem serious—at seventeen, dear Babe. For my part, I let the water slip; it is what the water likes, and it doesn't really do a bit more work in the world than I do."

"It turns the wheel of the corn-mill below there."

"Babe, you are wading over-deep for me. The water doesn't want to turn the wheel; it has been harnessed, and free spirits do not approve of harness."

I was thinking, of course, of the happy fate

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that had kept me a bachelor in Arcady, when it might so easily—Fate has always ways and means—have made of me a Benedick in Prose-land. Indeed, I was on the point of explaining to Cathy how entirely happy I was in having my snug corner of the world to idle in, in having a child-comrade so perfectly in harmony with those needs of companionship which, in fiction, a wife is supposed—absurdly and unwarrantably supposed—to fill. But I did not say as much to her, for a sudden question came to me—Would *she* prove as wise as I had been, and avoid a delusion almost universal? Would not Cathy, too, some day find that a Personage had come into her life, and that life without him was no life at all, and would she not leave me without scruple to roam a world outside my boundaries? The thought caused me an odd feeling of cold, as if the peat-brown stream below had risen to engulf me. Cathy would marry some day; yes, it was certain almost. Cathy would marry—but, oh, not yet, not yet!

In my eagerness to hold her back from any rashness of the kind, I laid my hand on hers as it rested on the bridge, and then I felt nonsen-

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sical, of course, for good chums do not as a rule indulge in sentimental vagaries.

"The—the Blue Andalusian—you're forgetting all about her," says Cathy, in a stumbling way.

"True, I had forgotten the Blue Andalusian," and I laugh, without knowing why my merriment sounds strained, inadequate. I am often perplexed nowadays when the Babe is with me.

Then we go through the wicket-gate, and across to the orchard, and so into the white-washed outbuilding where Cathy keeps her fowls. All the other hens are foraging abroad, but the Blue Andalusian, Betty, sits like a mourning wife at home and hugs her perch. Betty is evidently in a sad way; her eye is lusterless and dim, her head exhibits queer mounds and hillocks of fluff-covered flesh; but, so far as I can judge, she has neither thrush nor canker.

"A very bad cold, that is all, Babe," I pronounce, with the solemnity of a judge delivering sentence.

Then I examine the wall immediately behind the perch and find a cranny there, through which the wind is whistling.

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"Persuade Betty not to sit in a draught in future—or shall I stop the hole for you?"

Cathy looks at me as if I were all-wise; and I, being a simple sort of person in the main, am pleased by the simple flattery. It is true that all my hen-lore has been picked up from Tom Lad, and that I distrust my diagnosis in the subtler forms of disease—yet surely I am skilled enough to treat a cold, to stop a chink in a fowl-house wall, and if Cathy chooses to think my knowledge wonderful—well, it is an innocent amusement on her part.

Before I leave I concoct pills from strange ingredients, and persuade Betty to swallow one; the rest I leave with the Babe, with instructions as to a segregation camp to be formed for Betty and any other fowl who may happen to catch an infectious cold. Indeed, I am wonderfully businesslike and practical about it all; but what I think of, as I recross the bridge, is the girlish figure that stood here beside me awhile since, and of that unthinking caress of mine which was so little in keeping with comradeship. Cathy will begin to laugh at me by and by if I attempt to dovetail any heavy-father sentiment on to our friendship.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE OFFENSIVENESS OF THE OUSEL-COCK, WITH SOME NOTES ON AN OLD PARSON AND ON HIS PERPLEXING VIEWS OF WEDLOCK.

MY views of bird life and bird morals are altering as the year goes on. They invariably alter in just the same way, and Tom Lad's way of laughter is unchanging, too. While there were currants on the bushes, the blackbirds and the thrushes seemed to dine exclusively on fruit; but by and by the currant trees were all stripped bare, and I awoke one morning to find the first two rows of peas attacked. I felt mildly, not vindictively, incensed against my friends, whose code of honor should have been so chivalrous. On the second morning half the crop was gone. It had been a good crop, almost ready for the ingathering, and now there was a line of shriveled pods,

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with perhaps one pea left at the end of each. Still, I tried to reason the thing out in favor of the birds; but when a blackbird came and settled on the pea-sticks, a yard or so away, and began his unholy labors of the day, I became at once a primitive man, with passions bloodthirsty and elemental. There was something in the cool, outrageous way in which this colored gentleman attacked the pods and picked the kernels out that was offensive to the last degree. And when I went in haste for Mrs. Styles, and together we began to pluck the crop lest all should go, the blackbird flew into a neighboring tree and used language suited only to a three-bottle buck of the old school.

This was the last straw, I think; that he should take my crop was bad enough, but to upbraid me as a trespasser on his domain was simply outrage. I got my rifle accordingly, and Tom Lad surprised me in the act of cleaning it in the potting-shed; for I am ashamed to say that I cannot take my rook rifle as seriously as nobler guns, and each summer finds it a little rusty, without and within.

"Oh, you've come to that, sir, have you?"

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is Tom's greeting. "Well, it's a pity you didn't think of it before—say, before breeding time."

This little scene recurs, if memory serves me, every year; and Tom enjoys a yearly triumph, of which he makes the most, when sentiment and practise come into conflict with each other, and I take a fierce vow to slay and spare not.

Even yet, however, I am not so fierce as I wish to be. I fire vaguely over the birds' heads, and the thrushes soon learn to avoid the place. I am glad of this, for the throstle is one of our sacred birds up here in northern lands, and I should be ridiculously sorry if harm came to any of the race through me. With the ousel cock it is different; he is black of hue, and none too clean of character, I fear; he possesses a crude and easy impertinence of his own, and is near akin in many ways to the worst type of cockney street urchin. No amount of firing over his head disturbs this sable ruffian; he knows that you are jesting, and he gibes at you with that quick, rolling scream of his which so oddly resembles bad language.

After three days of this, as a rule, I am quite

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as fierce as need be. I have treated my enemy leniently, and he takes advantage of it ; well, he must look for the penalty. Yet somehow I forget, year by year, that a blackbird is singularly difficult to kill ; he is as full of feints as a snipe, and has, moreover, a clever trick of hiding all but the feathery, inconsequential part of him behind cover. This morning only I went into the garden and saw one of these gentry at the end of a long row of peas. I fired, but he ducked behind the sticks almost before I pressed the trigger, and chuckled like an imp of darkness as he swerved up and over the red wall. Gradually, as day after day goes by, I learn that pea sticks are better cover than one would imagine ; day by day the ousels grow more cheerily abusive ; at last there comes a morning when one of them, grown haughty as some undefeated knight of old, slips over the wall at my entry, and sits on an overhanging thorn, and gives me the lie direct. I notice that his body, as usual, is shielded, but he has stuck his tail feathers out in patent mockery. I aim at these tail feathers, and out they come ; and my enemy, with a cry of startled dismay, goes winging to a neighboring thicket. I hear

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him expostulating loudly, and presently a second blackbird voice—his wife's, I guess—joins in. So far as I can interpret the ousel tongue, this is their colloquy :

Tailless Husband : “It was a pure fluke ! Why did I put out my tail ?”

Wife : “Where is your tail, dear ? I always said I could never bear to be a laughing-stock to the other lady ousels by parading a good man bald in the tail.”

Husband (weakly) : “Where is my tail ? I—I lost it, my dear.”

Wife (tartly) : “So it seems. Have you been fighting again ?”

Husband (his voice betraying a sudden hope) : “Yes, dear—fighting for your honor.”

Wife : “Oh, tell me all about it !”

Husband (manifestly more cheerful, as he sees further into his lie) : “I came on three ousels just now who live in the next garden, and overheard them talking of you.”

Wife : “Were they handsome ousels, dear ?”

Husband : “No, they were not ; they were ugly as cats. One said that you—I am ashamed to repeat it—that you were no better than you ought to be, that you were not always home at

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a respectable hour, that you had been seen to flirt with——”

Wife : “ Oh, well, every one knows what scandal mongers they are in the next garden.”

Husband : “ Of course, I didn’t believe a word of it ; but I couldn’t bear to think that such riff-raff should have your name upon their beaks at all, and so I gave them the lie.”

Wife : “ My brave, true boy ! ”

Husband : “ I fought, one against three, until I thought my strength was gone. Then I thought of you, my darling, and I made a last effort, and they broke and fled before me.”

Wife : “ My own brave boy ! ”

Husband (growing constantly more complacent) : “ But that was not all, my cherished. Just afterwards I met two cats. One I blinded at the first onslaught, and the second caught me by the tail feathers as I flew to you. Indeed, I should have stayed to finish the second cat, my sweet, but I was eager to get home to the wee wife.”

Wife (with a pathetic gurgle in her voice) : “ Dear one, how proud I shall be of you ! Why, your tail, dear, is ennobled by its baldness——”

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(Diminishing to what seems a slough of tenderness.)

So, friend Blackie, after all, being a clever bird, has scored by what I thought my triumph.

I began soon to adopt fresh tactics with the ousel. Now and then I secured a victim by taking him unawares before he could find cover behind the sticks ; but a more sporting and more paying game was to take them flying. Their method was always the same, and I watched them carefully. Directly I came within range they would drop among the pea sticks ; then come out at the far end low to the ground ; then, with a swerve and an upward dash, they would drop like a puff of wind to the other side of the wall. I grew tolerably expert at these shots with practise ; but my tailless friend, who reappeared on the day after his adventure with unabated confidence, had still the better of me. He was cleverer than his fellows, as, indeed, his knowledge of the whole duty of a husband goes to show, and, instead of getting up at the expected place, he would run in and out among the rows, until at last he took his flight in some quite unexpected place.

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We began to take the combat personally, he and I. We enjoyed it; yet constantly he laughed at me. At last there came a day, however, when he forgot his cunning. I came upon him unexpectedly; he followed the usual tactics of his brethren, and a quick shot brought him down.

Poor ousel cock! I was sorry as I looked upon his corpse, sable and still and pitiful. He had had a mellow song in springtime, rich, lover-like, and eager; he would have sung again next spring may be. Was a handful of Marrowfat peas worth all this loss? Then, too, there was the wife, who thought him brave and flawless. I had widowed her; yet haply had he lived he would have lied to her once too often, and all her faith would have been turned to gall. But did he lie? He may have had a poet's fancy, after all, and have believed the legend he told her of the vanished tail. At any rate, he is past defending himself, and we'll remember him only as a jolly sportsman and an epicure in peas.

I look up from the body of my victim to see a jolly, round figure, a comely face, a pair of brown, good-humored eyes, which are framed

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by the open doorway of the garden and the glimpse of trees behind. It is the Rector, come in search of me in the likeliest of my haunts ; and the Rector whenever he appears upon a scene has an odd quality of making life seem gayer, rounder, more complete. I have heard many sermons from him, but cannot somehow remember what his dogmas are or whether he has any. What I do remember of his homilies is the abiding sense of charity and tolerance which goes with you after service down the gravestone-dotted path, which accompanies you beneath the lych-gate, which starts to life again through all the coming week whenever tolerance or charity is asked of you. He is not brilliant, and his shooting is superior to his power of thought ; but he is wise and sufficiently witty, and I never heard him utter a word of malice or unkindly criticism of his neighbors ; he is, in brief, in keeping with his own church—that “ decent church that topt the neighboring hill,” which Goldsmith has described for all time in half a dozen words. The Rector is beloved of children, of vagabonds and rogues, of sturdy farmers who care little for his calling, but a great deal for the man ; and when,

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as often happens, I must confess, he meets me returning from a Sunday morning spent upon the hills, he taps me on the shoulder with fatherly regard.

“ You worship in the green church, eh, my boy ? ” is his greeting at such times. “ Well, God founded that church, and I’m sure you heard a better sermon from the larks than I could have read you. Fancy, boy ! I preached for five-and-twenty minutes, and it was only Farmer Greenhaugh’s snores that brought me to a finish.”

And here he is this morning, come, as it proves, to take me for a day’s fishing. And, after a morning’s sport that makes our baskets agreeably heavy, we come to rest under a great sycamore and spread our feast of sandwiches, and whisky, and water from the burn ; and the Rector talks pleasantly of fishermen who cast brave flies of old. He has even a story—dark and hard to credit—of a fisherman he knew (a parishioner long deceased, and therefore useless as a witness) who kept an unspotted reputation for the truth, and who asked to have engraved upon his tomb the words, “ He was a good smoker and he never

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overstated by an ounce the weight of lost fish or of captured." And then the Rector, *à propos* of nothing, turns to me.

"What a pity if you married, boy," he observes.

I feel my face grow warm, for some stupid reason. "It is not likely, sir," I answer.

"Ah, well, I should say it was very likely, and a pity to boot. No more days of this sort, my young friend, when once you take a wife; just because they are healthy, reasonable, and good for your spirits she will put a veto on them; *she* is not included, you see, and she grows jealous of the old parson."

"But suppose—suppose she could join in the sport, and bring home as good a basket as one's self?" I say, without weighing my words beforehand. And again I feel myself grow hot, for there was a lassie who *could* share the sport, and it was ridiculous that I should think of her when only marriage was in question.

"Why, then, I should be equally out of the hunt," the Rector goes on, half cheerily, half dolefully; "and you wouldn't fight with the old vigor, you know. It would be all interludes, and 'Colin, kiss me in the shade,' and

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pretty pastoral work of that kind ; but the trout would laugh at you. Be advised, boy ; never give trout or seasoned old bachelors a chance to laugh at you."

After this he talks so lightly and so well on the joys of bachelorhood, with such a careless flick of his mental finger, so to speak, as if to brush away the little love-god like some disturbing fly, that I am cheered anew in my own lonely state, and thankful once again that the Babe is infantile enough as yet to be a comrade. We catch more trout after lunch, and afterwards, as we come home through the gloaming and the dew-wet reek of elderberry flowers, we hold weighty converse touching the one need of a man's life—the need to walk lonely and untroubled.

This cheers me a good deal, I confess, for lately I have developed a foolish habit of pitying myself ; have stayed more than once to watch a cottager sit smoking on his honeysuckle-weighted threshold, his wife and bairns about him ; and wondered if life's jagged edges might not be softened down by the quiet joys of domesticity. I went so far, indeed, as to confide something of these feel-

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ings to the Rector once as we walked home after fishing ; and he advised a change of air as the sure remedy for mawkishness.

" What are the rough edges to *your* life, boy ? " he asked.

And, truth to tell, I could find none, and so was silent. Yet that queer sense of loss was with me still at times.

Even the Rector failed me not long afterwards. I chanced to come upon him one evening as I was returning through the kirkyard, and the reddening sunlight had surprised a look of tenderness and sorrow beyond belief in the good-humored face. As he turned to me, without formal greeting of any kind, I saw that the tears stood bright and soft in his brown eyes.

" See yonder stone ? " he said, pointing to the grave at our right hand.

I knew the gravestone well, and had often speculated on that graceful epitaph, " To the memory of Nell Bywater, better known as Rose of the Vale, who died, in her twentieth year, to the grief of all the countryside."

Very quiet was the parson's touch on my shoulder, very quiet his voice. Old sorrow

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seemed to have refined his spirit to something worthier than the clay.

"I loved her, lad, and lost her," he said. "She married Ned Bywater, and died of her troubles before you were breaked. God, how I loved her!" he murmured, softly, as if to himself.

There was no word to be said on my part, or none that I could find, and, as we walked up and down together, he told me, with the same quiet voice, the sweetness of Nell Bywater and the way of it, the color of her eyes and hair, the grace that seemed to shine like sunshine when Rose of the Vale came down the valley-ways. It was as if some lang-syne ballad were whispering in my ear, and this old parson's talk, unrestrained for once, as if he walked and talked alone, was full of the passion which neither death nor life could kill, full of a reverence beyond belief. I could scarcely find in my heart to pity him, so bravely and so gladly he carried his cross, and counted it honor just to have loved the maid.

Many things grew clear to me on that homeward walk after I had bidden the leal old man farewell. This fabric of trite maxims on which

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I had reared my happy bachelorhood—what was it worth? If one could love as this good parson loved, surely there was something to be aimed for still in life beyond my round of geese-keeping, of rearing crops, of giving casual rogues the means wherewith to drink away my reputation for good sense.

I awoke with the same feeling on the morrow, and took myself to task for it. Surely there was something amiss with me nowadays; no healthy man could go worrying all the day as to what was lacking his life. Cathy herself would be the first to laugh at me, if she could guess the wanderings of my mind.

As if to add to my perplexities, I played the eavesdropper to-night quite unintentionally. The curtains were not drawn in the dining-room—I like to see the misty outline of the hills after dusk—and I saw Tom Lad, a lantern swinging from his hand, go past in the direction of the mistral. I remembered that the Alderney had been ailing for a day or two, and said to myself that I would go and see the patient on my own account as soon as dinner was over. The meal proved longer than usual, thanks to some special efforts made by Mrs. Styles in the

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way of entrées and a choice savory ; thanks, too, to the coffee, which was excellent to-night, and which kept me dawdling at table long after I had meant to be abroad. When I did go to the mistal at last I saw a fine Rembrandt picture, framed by the doorway of the byre—the Aldernéy turning her sleek head towards Tom Lad, and rubbing his coat-sleeve as if grateful ; Tom himself leaning against the stall, the lantern-light rough hewing his fine face into a finer contour still ; his coat was off, his arms were folded, and his pipe and the mighty smoke arising from it cast great shadows on the white-washed wall behind. Facing him was Mrs. Styles, her apron screwed tightly into one hand.

I was so lost in admiring the mere pictur-esquefulness of the scene that I halted at the door, forgetful of the fact that I might overhear more than was intended for my ears ; and then, as I gathered the drift of the talk, the comedy of it still kept me rooted to the spot.

“ Oh, so you’re idling again, are you ? ” the good woman was saying. “ I never did see a chap so easiful in all my days ; give you a pipe and a wall to lean against, and you settle into

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an easifulness that would madden a saint to watch."

Tom Lad for once seems minded to be brave. There is a slow smile on his face as he gently removes his pipe, rams down the contents, and relights it.

"I'm tending a sick beast," he says, with exasperating good humor.

"Oh, you are ; are you ? Well, I was reared on a farm, and it's the first time I heard you could cure a beast just by propping yourself up against its stall."

"Ay, but I've finished wi' the beast, you see."

"Then why don't you come into the house-place like a Christian husband should ?"

"I'll tell thee why, lass." Tom retorts, with a sleepy calm that is slightly overdone. "I stayed for a bit of peace, and I haven't found it seemingly."

My own surprise is surpassed by Mrs. Styles's ; for she can find no words, and Tom Lad wades recklessly into the deep waters that must soon engulf him.

"Ay," he goes on, "I used to find the greenhouse a snug, quiet spot, but you found me out. Then I tried the potting shed, and

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you found me out ; and now you've learned what a power of peace there can be in a mistal, and there'll be no peace no more. Well, we're born to trouble, lass, as Adam said when he found Eve in the Garden ! "

Mrs. Styles takes up the going then—a going as swift and breathless as if fox and hounds were tearing over the next meadow. She tells Tom Lad what she thinks of him to-day, what she has always thought of him, what his " innocent bairns " will think of him in times to come ; and, most of all, she insists upon his " easifulness " as if it were a crime. As for Tom, he is little short of splendid, for he still leans against the stall, and smokes, and regards his wife with the lenient smile of a man who watches a child at play. I begin to speculate as to whether his seeming dread of Mrs. Styles —the dread, I mean, which he usually exhibits —is not, after all, a subtle bit of strategy whereby he saves himself much trouble. And this " easifulness " of his ? Is it not the keynote of that cheery health which keeps his boyhood quick in him, though he is nearing fifty now ? Tom Lad can work with the best, when work is in the doing ; he can play at playing-time ;

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and these two things are needful to any man who asks enjoyment of his days.

Mrs. Styles, wearying at last of her onslaught on Tom the imperturbable, takes a new path, and one that disconcerts me.

"What with master and what with man, I'm sure I don't know what I'm coming to," she begins. "One easiful, t'other as innocent as a kitten three days old. He's going to be married—poor master, and to think I knew his mother before him!—and he doesn't so much know that he's on the road."

"Going to be married, is he?" said Tom, lazily. "Well, if he doesn't know of it, it's likely you won't. There's two to a bargain of that sort, so I've heard."

"May be there's two, may be, one. Oh, don't tell me, for telling's no use when you know. She's bonnie and trim enough, and wedlock high, and we all know what comes to a lad and lass when the lass goes poultry-rearing and wants his help, and goes fishing and wants his help, and goes scampering over stone walls and wants his help. Poor master! It's enough to make his mother turn fair round in her grave."

Astonishment and wrath, and a great desire

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to laugh keep me still an eavesdropper. What mad fancy had taken possession of Stylesey now? The only one who came to me for advice as to fowl-rearing and the making of flies was Cathy, and it was absurd to describe Cathy as "wedlock high." Just how high wedlock was, I was not sure; but Cathy could not be less than the dread standard.

"Well, he'll keep clear of wedlock, will the master, if my wishes go for aught," says Tom Lad, with unswerving laziness.

"How so? You've got a good wife yourself, let me tell you; and he ought to be proud and glad if he wins her."

"Oh, you're shifting to t'other side of the wind? Awhile since you were by way of pitying him."

"Well, if I want to shift, I'll shift," Mrs. Styles declares, with sudden and complete loss of temper. "Any woman's too good for any man, and why we put up with you all is a puzzle past my wits."

"Poor master!" murmurs Tom, adroitly, taking up the ground from which his wife has retreated. "It would be a sad day that saw him wedded. But there's one bright spot in

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it; he can afford to build more greenhouses. When she finds him out in one, he can hide in t'other, and so on. Now, I've got too few hiding places, and it's hiding places every man should begin to earn for himself the first day he thinks of wedlock."

Mrs. Styles drops her apron corner ; the corners of her mouth fall as if in sympathy. Finally, she begins a Philippic, halts in her speech, is silent for a moment, then bursts into a storm of tears. Tom Lad has won, now that he cares to fight his battle ; and it is a wondrous thing to see this practical, brisk woman revert so suddenly to the sentiment and easy tears of girlhood.

"And—and you like as you loved me once. But I was bonnie then ; at least, you used to tell me so when we met in Watercress Lane."

Tom Lad slowly put his pipe in his breeches' pocket ; there was consternation in his face. Then he went to her, and put his arm about her ; and I saw—tardily, perhaps—that it was time for me to flee.

So he had not won his battle, after all, for he was unprepared for the last reserve which the enemy could bring up. Well, it was better so,

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perhaps, and I was glad to think of Stylesey—apple-cheeked, unsentimental Stylesey—lying like a love-lorn maid in her good man's arms.

Yet I was troubled to think of the marriage so surely predicted for me. I wished I had not overheard the prophecies of my domestic Cassandra. I resolved to go and see Cathy very soon, because the child had such a sane, clear outlook upon things that mere contact with her would resolve my difficulties at once. The Babe, good soul, would scarcely know what marriage was !

CHAPTER VIII

CONCERNING THE CLEANING OF A PIPE, AND THE STRANGE ROMANCE IT LED TO

WHAT is amiss with the world, when one
is free to watch her changing moods—
free to realize that one day, one hour, is like
another only in its certainty of charm? Take
this one morn of spring, for instance, and follow
it till it is lost in gloaming, and your day shall
be as well spent as the best. At six of the day
the sun is mounting fast, and all the white,
wide sheets of mist are fair as fairyland. Little
by little, as the warmth draws up the vapor and
the sky grows brave and blue, the buttercups
in the home-meadows begin to shine—to shine,
as it were, through happy tears, for the dew is
necklaced round their petals. Then the dew,
in its turn, creeps sunward, and a spendthrift
sweep of yellow, deep and live and glowing,

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lies under the glad sky. Perhaps I may be moved by some old association, but this glory of the buttercups has always a strange charm for me ; it seems to sum up all the wealth of English poetry, it is so clean and pure and vivid. No wonder that the children, with their unspoilt taste, seek always the gleaming meads and tell each other, in entire good faith, the reason why butter is so golden.

The cows know all about the sweetness of the day. They are lying under a great sycamore at the far end of the pasture, chewing the cud more slowly than their wont ; and their faces, as they lift them now and then to low a thanksgiving, are full of the peace which looks not backward nor forward, but at the present only. Here and there are thrushes, youngsters who have decided to examine the world on their own account, and who, as they try their wings, are not sure whether the nest were not the best home after all. A kingfisher comes glancing down the stream, with that flash of blue which almost startles one. The thorn trees in the hedges are a mass of white, the wild lilac is in its prime of bloom, and everywhere are hyacinths, late primroses, and garlic that makes

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amends by grace of form for its offense of scent.

Look into the hedgerows, and into the green stuff that rises thick about their roots ; ants and spiders, caterpillars and the myriad grubs of caddis-fly, are as eager to be up and doing as their bigger brethren—and enemies—the birds. All is motion, effort, hope, and not a blade of grass bends low to the west wind but is doing the forward work of Nature. To stand in such a place, on such a day, is to rise above and beyond one's self, to become one with the teeming life about one, to realize, with a swift, up-springing of the spirit that is like no other joy I know, how full life is of sap. Oh, surely, there's enough to thank God for ; surely our troubles must be deep-seated and malignant if they dare stand between ourselves and such a day of spring. The hymn of work, the hymn of praise, sound constant in our ears ; and there is room for no regrets, since "Forward!" rings from the bugle-horn of May.

Follow the sun's progress through this his Kingdom of the Leafing Boughs; watch him drive the cattle, at high noon, to shelter of the watered trees ; see the long day slope west-

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ward, lengthening its shadow as it goes ; listen to the milking-song, and smell the gracious kine-breath as the trim beasts low their thanksgiving for udders eased of bounty. Then seek the meadow ways at gloaming, and hear the tired earth sigh herself to sleep ; and you will have lived as men can live in Arcady, though, as the world counts deeds, you have done nothing.

Thoughts of fair women and of men's high deeds are in my heart as I go slowly through that summer dusk which is so far removed from dark ; and it is only a touch of Fate's irony that interrupts my comfortable musings by a sudden stoppage of the free draught in my pipe. Believe me, a free draught in one's pipe is essential to lofty speculation of any kind, and I seek vaguely about me for a cleaner of some sort.

The so-called serious problems of our lives are not seldom frivolous ; but to nine men out of ten who are earnest smokers nowadays, this question of the Complete Cleaner is an urgent one. The inexperienced, as they go through the fields at eve, are tempted to use meadow grasses, and usually these block the pipe still

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further with seed stuff ; there are twenty doubtful expedients resorted to, even by the more experienced, but the feather only gives assured results.

Now, the rooks who have long since taken my house and garden under their wing are not a generous race in most matters, but in respect of discarded feathers they are generous to a fault ; so to-night, avoiding the grasses and the other makeshifts for the cleansing of a pipe, I stroll through my garden gate and cross the lawn in search of what I need.

It would seem a trivial matter to go out in search of the wherewithal to clean a dirty pipe ; yet in Arcady a trivial excursion may yield excitement unexpectedly. In the half light I catch a sheen of light on a gray feather ; before using it, I happen to glance more closely at it, and see, printed in thick, firm characters, "707. REMEMBER."

I do not put that feather to base uses ; instead, I go to the seat under the lime tree, and hold my treasure-trove between a thumb and finger, and ponder on the meaning of that subtle word "REMEMBER." The 707 is clearly the number by which fanciers of carrier-pigeons are

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wont to name their birds ; but " Remember " leads one at once to the misty regions of romance. Who has sent the message, and who should have been the recipient ? By what malicious stroke of fate has this one important feather been singled out to fall ?

Imagination, once set going, works merrily. Of course, it must be a case of true love running none too smooth ; he is far away, and she is surrounded by over-many suitors for his peace of mind ; so he has sent her this brief message, plain to be read by understanding eyes. That he has chosen this method of writing, instead of secreting a note beneath the pigeon's wing, shows how great the need of caution is. The bird might fall into her father's hands, and he might discover the hidden note ; but surely the most jealous father in romance or in plain daily life, would never think of examining each feather separately. Yes, clearly, there are grave difficulties surrounding this ill-fated pair ; and I am sorry, personally sorry, that the pigeon's message should have been wasted upon me ; it is a touch of irony which besets the way of all true lovers.

By and by, as fancy takes the bit between

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her teeth, I grow so interested in that pale lassie (yes, she is pale, and the rules of the game compel her to be fair as a drooping lily) who is eating her heart out for sake of the absent ne'er-do-weel; I am prepared to begin a life-long quest, if need be—in search of the rightful owner of that feather. Indeed, I might have started forthwith on the shadowy trail, had not Tom Lad approached me with some ridiculous question as to the killing of a couple of fowls. The one leads on to others, as is the way when Tom wishes to lure me into work, and presently I find myself assisting—more in the way of advice than of mere practical labor, I fear—with the construction of a hen-run. The making of hen-runs is scarcely conducive to play of fancy, and it is evening before my thoughts return to that cryptic "707. REMEMBER."

It begins to haunt me—not in the ill-mannered fashion of most hauntings, but in a pleasant well-bred way. I can think of nothing but the affairs of the lady, the ne'er-do-weel, and the carrier pigeon; the chief actors in the drama have already grown so real to me that my concerns seem trivial. I want to know what effect upon my new friends this dropping of

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"707. REMEMBER," has really had ; I do so hope the lassie will not need a reminder of this kind, that she will defy her father and the thronging suitors. One of the suitors I can see already with great distinctness—a hectoring, great-jowled ruffian, rich in goods and gear, whom one longs to kick at sight. It is monstrous that he should secure the prize ; I grow feverish at the prospect ; surely the girl will not throw herself away for lack of one short message.

"707. REMEMBER." It is no good. Laugh at myself as I will, smoke my after-dinner cigar with never so sedulous an attempt to enjoy the fragrance of the garden, the message has crept into my brain and means to be its guest. Fancy, after all, strikes the true note of life, and I just abandon myself to the watching of this quick romance whose proper ending has been jeopardized by the falling out of a pigeon's feather. I am already intimate with the hero, and find him a gay comrade ; he's a ne'er-do-weel from sheer joy in living, not from vice ; he can tell a good story as well as he can woo a maid ; it is understood, by both of us, that he will surrender the old, wild ways as soon as the lass's hand is

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safe in his. Oh, I have no doubt of her happiness, once the father is satisfactorily eluded, for this scapegrace hero is the rarest of good fellows.

Well, nothing can be done to-night, at any rate; perhaps he has taken the precaution to send two carrier-pigeons; yes, surely he has shown the little common-sense needed to do that. Yet I am anxious, somehow, the girl is so young to the world's way—her will is not hardened yet—the big-jowled suitor is with her now, making the most of opportunity—and there is no one to kick him quietly out of harm's way—and he is proving the true lover to be false. Suddenly a clear, merry voice breaks into my romance.

"I believe he's asleep, Cloudy."

I return to life, with a sense of vague surprise, and see Cathy standing at the far-end of the lawn, one hand resting on the noble head of Angus MacLeod, the Scotch hound, the other swinging a basket of eggs. Behind her is the reddening sun, dipping fast into the summer hills, and I realize, in a misty, half-comprehending way, that this might well be the heroine of the carrier-pigeon episode, except that Cathy is

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not pale, but flushed with laughter and good spirits.

"Angus MacLeod knows better; I was never more awake," I return, going to meet her.

"But you looked so—so other-worldly, you know—that I was sure you must be asleep. See what I've brought you—the sitting of eggs I promised from the blue hen; dad said I might run down with them after dinner, if you would come back and have a game of billiards with him."

I inspect the eggs, and promise to return with her; then she looks up quizzically.

"What were you thinking of when I disturbed you?" she asks. "It must have been something dreadfully serious."

"It was, Babe. There's a bonnie lassie away up in Scotland"—I have not given the lady a local habitation until this moment, but the romance has been going forward apparently on its own account—"and she's in love with a good fellow who dare not be seen in the country just now—and I'm bothered about her prospects and his."

For some reason a little cloud settles on Cathy's face; she does not seem as interested

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as I should wish, but stoops to tie the ears of Angus MacLeod into imaginary knots.

"He is tremendously in love with her, you know, Babe, and he sent her a message by carrier-pigeon not long since, and the message miscarried—see, here it is."

She looks at the feather, then at me. "I—I don't quite understand," she falters. "I suppose you mean that it was *you* who sent the message, and—and—" She seems to need a new grip of courage at this point, though I cannot understand in the least why my idle romance should trouble her—"and, of *course*, it will all come right, and—I so hope it will."

I laugh outright, and regret it directly I see the deepening lines of trouble on her face. "Why, infant, I picked up the feather by accident, and know no more than you of the lady in Scotland. I've been weaving fairy tales about her, that is all."

Girl children, when they are growing out of childhood with disconcerting haste, are apt to perplex one. Cathy loses her look of trouble at once, and takes the feather from me, and becomes as interested as I was myself not long ago. Why should this moment of disquiet

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have come to her? The problem is a vital one, and one more difficult to unravel than the fate of my Scottish lady of high degree.

"It is splendid!" cries the Babe, after a long inspection of the feather. "Why, did not Charles the First say just that to Bishop Juxon?"

"Yes, and they removed his head before he could finish the sentence; a most tantalizing thing to do, Babe."

"And we have all been wondering ever since what he meant to say. Oh, there are fifty romances to be made out of this; fifty, Cloudy, do you understand?" This with a peremptory tap on the head of Angus MacLeod.

"You see," she goes on, after a pretty pause of expectation and deep thought, "it might have to do with a prisoner; he is shut up in the tower of a German castle, because he was in love with the Baron's daughter—and the pigeon was their go-between—every morning he flew in between the prison bars and brought his message of 'Remember,' and every evening he returned to his mistress with the same message. Can't you see it all? Then at last he carries a little file, and bits of cord, and more

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bits, and more bits, until the prisoner has enough for a stout rope—and he files through the bars—and *she* is waiting for him underneath, you know—it's such a delightful tale!"

"I can't quite reconcile myself to your version, Babe. These Scotch folk have pleaded their case so well that they've got all my sympathy."

"Oh, but there is something wrong in that tale. If the Scotch girl really loved your friend—really and truly, you know—she would be sending *him* the message, for I'm quite sure she would never need to be told to 'remember.'"

"Now, wisest of all infants, how comes it that you can talk so easily of what a love-lorn lassie feels?"

She is silent for a moment, then glances at me with the look of some shy, woodland thing, surprised by strangers and not knowing whether they are friends or foes. There is a dewiness, as of tears to come, in the frank eyes.

"I—I don't talk easily of it—I—how should I know anything of it?" she falters. "Love seems so *stupid*, Murphy, out of a book."

For a moment the shadow, as it were, of understanding crosses my mental vision; but I can find no substance, and the shadow vanishes

Concerning the Cleaning of a Pipe —for Cathy is laughing at me with her old-time softness.

"What foolish dreams you have woven about a pigeon's feather," she says. "Come and play billiards with dad, for he is dreadfully tired of his own company to-night."

I thought little of pigeons' feathers for the remainder of the evening; it was close work enough to beat the Squire in three consecutive games, and I was too indolently happy, when I reached home, to speculate upon the word "Remember."

Next morning, however, it was back again. "707. REMEMBER," was my first conscious thought; the thing was becoming an obsession. After breakfast I strolled out to the lime tree, and put the feather on my knee, and gazed at its message as if sheer looking at it could unravel its mystery. Again I was perturbed at thought of that bonnie Highland lassie—yes, she was unquestionably Highland by this time—of the relentless chieftain who had promised her to the grim, forbidding neighbor whom one yearned to kick—of the message waiting dumbly here, when it should have voiced itself aloud in some far Northern bower. Really, it was too

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absurd, but, do as I would, the possible tragedy of those two lovers' fates disturbed me mightily.

As I sat, weaving my romance and blowing out great clouds of smoke, Tom Lad again approached me with some suggestion of work to be done. As I have indicated, Tom is never happy unless he can make an ease-loving comrade fall in step with him.

"I was just coming, sir, to see if you would lend a hand with—"

He stops abruptly, and his eye is riveted on the pigeon's feather, lying full in the sunlight and showing its love message to any passer-by.

"May I ask where you picked this up, sir?" he says.

"On the lawn here." I am rather nettled that strange eyes should pry into my romance.

"Well, there's naught so queer in it, then, as there might have been."

"How do you mean, Tom?"

"Only that yond feather has come off a pigeon I bought a week since."

"Oh!" I murmur, too faintly for Tom Lad to hear.

"It's funny now, if you come to think of it," he proceeds imperturbably, "that just yond

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feather should have dropped. It has the owning mark on it, you'll have noticed."

"Yes, but what does 'Remember' mean?"

Tom laughs. "Oh, that? That's just a bit of what you might call marlaking. I bought the pigeon, you see, of Dicky o' the Craven Arms, and he was always one for a joke. I should tell you I was sixpence short of the price when it came to settling up—my wife, you see, keeps my pockets fairish lean—and, while I was looking at the number marked on yond feather you're holding, Dicky writes on 'Remember.' 'What's that for?' I says. 'To call to mind you owe me sixpence,' says he."

"I see no joke there, Tom; perhaps I am dull," I say with dignity.

So this is the end of my romance! A vulgar matter of six coppers, a sordid deal in pigeons—these are the beginning and the end of my lady in the North and my gallant exiled in the South. If it had been a guinea that was in the case—but sixpence!

Heigho! It is a mistake to learn too much. Obsession or no, I would cheerfully exchange my new-found prose for the poetry that has been haunting me since yester morning. At

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any rate, I will not tell Cathy of this ; the Babe shall go on weaving her lace-work of romance, and some day, may be, she will write the true and hitherto-unpublished romance of the Carrier Pigeon which rescued a hero from a castle by carrying to him twine, and files, and daily love messages. Or shall we make a free gift of the plot to Mr. Anthony Hope? He would develop it prettily, if I am not mistaken, and Cathy surely would not grudge it to him.

CHAPTER IX

ON ROOKS, WITH AN EXCURSION INTO CAT-LAND

BEFORE I forget to talk of pigeons, I must set down the comedy of the Hermit Bird, whose conduct has amused me, off and on, for twelve months at least.

Tom Lad has his own pigeons, and I have a few score of my own ; but it is curious that a cock-pigeon has chosen to take up his quarters, apart from either flock, in a ruined watch-tower that stands at the top of Pasture Hill, just above the house. The tower was used, if tradition holds good, for protection against the Scotch who used to come, in my forebears' days, unpleasantly near to Yorkshire homesteads ; it is full of crannies now, and wall-flowers blow where once the anxious eyes strained Northwards, and never a sound of pipe

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or battle-cry comes down the wind to disturb
the hermit-pigeon.

All last summer I watched him, and through the winter; and I set him down as one who had been disappointed with the pigeon-world —a lonely, crabbed bird, who liked to nurse his grievances. He would not feed with the other pigeons, preferring instead to pick up a doubtful livelihood in field or wood ; so, little by little, I began to feed him, and a distant sort of acquaintanceship was established between us. On my side I would have welcomed a friendship ripening into intimacy, but he seemed to have steeled himself against the deeper feelings, and in his happiest moods I still knew him for a cynic.

I grow interested, more and more, in this wayfarer. It is always so, for some reason—the vagrant, the down-at-heels, the beggar in pocket and companionship, finds the straight road to a man's heart, while his disreeter fellows scarcely interest us. And, with it all, this cock-pigeon was in some sense a fraud ; as the summer went on I noticed that he spent more time about his toilet ; his draggled feathers were preened into an apology for decency, and

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finally grew sleek ; he gave himself vague, ridiculous airs at times, as if he remembered days of revelry and youth. It was about this time that he began to absent himself, at first for a day at a time, then for longer intervals ; and sometimes, when he came back, he looked as if he had a headache, while sometimes, again, he was jaunty to the degree of boisterousness.

I noted these things, and so did Tom Lad, who has a keen eye for bird or beast life.

"Tom," I said, one morning, as we were watching the old rascal preening himself at large on the tower-top, "Tom Lad, he goes to town, that bird, just as we unfeathered folk go when we need a frolic."

"Well, there, sir, I believe you're right," Tom answers, with great seriousness, "for I've noticed his wing feathers are always dirtier when he comes back than when he leaves."

"A woman in the case, Tom ?"

"Likely, sir. Fools and men and pigeons are all made the one way."

Towards the end of summer, sure enough, our friend returns in high feather, a hen-bird with him this time ; and the latter's trousseau is so undeniably sooty that it is plain she is

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town-bred and town-reared. Her ways, too, are those of the town, which stamp themselves indelibly on birds and men.

I laugh a good deal, in a friendly way, at that old cock-pigeon. Where is his boasted cynicism, his aloofness? Gone, at a glance from a hen-bird's eye! It is comforting to find that men are not in all respects more foolish than the beasts.

We watch the couple assiduously, Tom and I, and find, as we expected, that the new wife airs all her so-called graces of the town. She is oblivious of the fact that her plumage is twice as white as it was on her arrival, her condition altered altogether for the better; instead, she sits on the tower beside her mate, and nags at him in a persistent way, and is clearly pointing out the difference of her position now and then.

"Can't you almost hear what she's saying, sir?" chuckles Tom. "I can, for I'm a married man myself. When she lived in a town, and had a town-husband, like, she'd tease him, early and late, to get out into the country; and now there's naught good enough for her compared with streets and shops and houses. Oh, ay, I've

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been wedded—and so has yon cock-pigeon now."

Though his after-conduct is understandable enough, the motive which prompted our Hermit Pigeon's seclusion from the world must remain a secret for all time; he cannot tell us his life story even if he would, and he is only one of many mysteries that Arcady, like a skilled storyteller, holds from our ken.

It is well, once in a way, to sit apart in a quiet nook, and to remind ourselves how many riddles Dame Nature brings us for solution. No day, no hour, as I have said, is like the last; the change for which men hunger, the change which they seek, and do not find, in cities, is waiting for us, here in the deep-bosomed woods, here in the alder-guarded stream, here on the open heathward hills. There's not a corner of Nature's sky-roofed house but offers study for a lifetime—and, after the lifetime's study is completed, the old men seem to marvel at the littleness of all that they have learned. And if one corner of the mighty House —where we are welcome guests, if only we be thralls-in-love to our Mother who has built it—if one corner is so full of treasure for the heart and mind, what

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of the whole fabric? It is bewildering, this home of ours, with its mysteries of corn and fruit, of little life and big, of gnats that are fashioned as carefully as men, and of men whose reason is paramount, but whose instinct is lower than that of any other sentient thing.

It has surely been a grievous loss to us, this decay of the instinct which was needful for our preservation in the far-off days; we can only regain it by long hardship and endeavor—create our instinct, as it were, as in the matter of horsemanship or the handling of a gun—and we must toil through life, propped by the crutch of reason at every turn, whereas once on a time—that golden once on a time which only the boy enjoys for a brief year or two—we lived as the wind lives, blowing whither instinct led us. Some day, if a philosopher is born who chances not to be a pedant, we may have a wondrous book—a romance in very truth—which will tell of all the happiness we might enjoy if only we could, keeping our men's hearts in men's bodies, regain the ear for that delicate, true note of instinct to which the choiring of the Spheres is all attuned.

It is the rooks that are responsible for this

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homily. Of myself, and in cold blood, I should never think of discussing theories bounded by the planets; how can one, when there is a bed of lettuce to be pricked out, and after that a dish of trout to be cozened from the river? The rooks, however, gave me a call this morning, and they have set me thinking. Of all the birds—of all animals, perhaps, except the elephant—rooks offer the hardest page of Nature that is given us to master. Year by year I watch them; year by year I grow more familiar with their ways, their morals; but the meaning of the outward show lies hidden.

Some of their actions, of course, are to be interpreted even by our human reason. After a winter's storm, for instance, when the nests in the rookery outside my window have been rocked like wave-tossed cobbles all the night, when twigs and branches carpet all the sodden lawn, I shall be roused by a fussy *caw-cawing*, and shall find my friends remarkably busy about doing nothing. They do not attempt to renovate their nests against the coming Spring; they merely circle round, and settle for a moment, and resume their hurried chatter. Clearly they have come simply on a visit of inspection,

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to see what damage the storm has done; and, if one may venture to go further, I have a fancy that the belief in their own importance is so great that they come, as it were, to *forbid* the storm to do any further havoc.

For it is not to be disputed that the rook's self-importance is his strongest trait. See with what an aristocratic, off-hand air they take possession of a garden and caw in patronizing sort at the humble folk who live beneath their shadow. Let no man think he owns a house who owns a rookery; for the house centers round the rookery, and there are fifty voices telling you as much at every moment of the day. Of whom does he remind us, the rook? Of many people at different times; but just now, as we watch him swaying on a topmost bough, and looking down on us with his aloof, superior air, he is oddly like a family butler, grown gray in service and molded to a surprised and lofty outlook on intrusion. At times, too, he seems to be a bishop, of the decorous, persuasive order, but more often still he is that unique combination of the bishop and the family butler which we are rarely privileged to meet in human life.

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Now, with regard to these periodic visits of the rooks. Granted that, after storm, their visits are understandable, why should they have called to-day? Spring has merged into summer; the youngsters are off and away; not for weeks have I been favored with a visit. There have been no gales, no thunderstorms; yet at six of the morning, while I was putting a new heft to an axe at the door of the tool-house, I was surprised by an influx of at least a hundred of my non-rent paying tenants. As in winter, they fussed about their nests, but without any of that acute complaint in their voices which is usual at such times. They stayed perhaps an hour, and seemed rather jolly, as if they had come on a picnic organized by the Freemasons of their body; then, without apparent reason, they left, and I saw them disappear above the hill-crest. I should like to understand what led them here.

Again, why do rooks leave a place. Why do the nests grow fewer and fewer every year, although to all appearance the surroundings are in every way the same? There comes a time to most rookeries when a curse seems to have fallen on one's house, when, by small but

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sure degrees, the empty nests are filled by no fresh broods, when fewer young ones come out each May, and spread and flop and balance themselves upon the greening branches. My own rookery here is falling off, and I am growing skeptical as to the wisdom of the yearly battue. True, the parent-birds have not resisted until now this slaughter of the innocents which furnishes the village tables with pies; true, the wise men tell us that this yearly slaughter is needful to the welfare of the greatest number, just as young Dick would recommend a judicious slaughter of girl-babies. But, for all that, I begin to doubt; rook shooting is a pleasant sport in itself, and possibly the father of the battue theory was one who loved the sport. We all remember the story of the small girl who was found leaning against a sundial and watching the movements of a fly upon the dial-face.

“Ickle fly, who made ‘oo?’”

“God,” went on the small girl, giving question and answer both.

“Ickle fly, does ‘oo love God?’”

“Ess!”

“Ickle fly, would ‘oo like to go to God?’”

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“ Ess ! ”

“ Den go ! ”

The advocate of rook-shooting always reminds me a little of that baby-girl whose passion was for killing flies.

At any rate, I mean to have a few close seasons, and to watch carefully the result ; for I would rather lose ten acres of my land—and that means half—than lose my rookery.

What is it about rooks that gives them so sure a place in our affection ? Not their power of returning personal affection, certainly, for they have as little power of that sort as cats have, and, like cats, they spend what heart they have upon the place that harbors them.

Is it their grace of person ? Assuredly not, for their movements are often of a kind to suggest buffoonery. Their song is harsh, their morals—if the truth must out, in spite of sentiment—are for the most part atrocious. Yet their song is one of the sweetest in all England, to the heart if not to the physical ear ; and the rook, with all his faults, is to us so inseparably wrapped up with old-world houses, old-world storied gardens, old-world graces and high chivalry such as only the roomy days of

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old could know, that we accept him as he is, and love him for his family, so to speak, as if he were a lordling whose way of life is dubious, but who comes to us with the fine light of past glories. Nay, State and Church would fall, most surely, if we began to be disloyal to the rook by setting plainly forth his faults.

Some facts we seem to know about the periodic migrations of the rooks—as, for instance, that the dwellers in smaller rookeries always return for certain periods to the parent home. In my own case I have reason to think that my coterie, when it leaves me for a while, pays a visit of ceremony and friendliness combined to the great rookery behind the Hall. Yet it is hard to be sure of any sort of fact, and people are constantly perplexing one by the suggestion of new points of view. A patient observer of my acquaintance, who has watched his rookery for a score years at the least, asserts that there are three rooks to a nest at breeding time, but he cannot determine whether it is polyandry or polygamy that is practised. Surely it is a disturbing theory; for faithfulness to one lady at a time is inseparably associated in our minds with the rook tribe.

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It is a firm belief with some, moreover, that the rooks hold courts of justice, and though I have never attended such assizes, I have had descriptions of them from eye-witnesses. It seems that if a sentry is found sleeping at his post on some high tree—say, when his brethren are feeding in a pasture—if he endangers their safety by any negligence—the elders of the flock assemble, as our ancestors did, in open-air court, and try the offender with scrupulous attention to the claims of justice, and sentence him to death if they find him guilty of misdemeanor. The sentence in that case is carried out forthwith, and feather by feather the luckless victim is stripped bare of life by the willing beaks of his fellows.

One can well imagine such a court of justice; for the rook, when he is not looking like a butler or a bishop, is apt to wear a strongly legal cast of countenance. Something in his superior, well-nigh impudent disregard of facts which do not affect his own case, something in the cut of his coat, and that heavy dignity which is semi-comic, are reminiscent both of Bar and Bench, and to ask, say, what the junior counsel for the accused meant by the bird-equivalent for

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"Tit-Bits" or "Nursery Handicap" would surely tickle an old judge of Rookland.

See the rook as sentry again—a faithful sentry—and he assumes a new character altogether; he is a soldier from beak to tail feathers, erect and watchful and ready for quick action. What rôle does he not play, indeed, this cheerful, noisy, selfish bird? Truly, all the world's a stage with him, and he takes with equal readiness to each allotted part.

Well, we love him, faults and all ; we could not feel at home without him ; and I must certainly preserve those three close seasons that I spoke of a while since. The result may be, of course, that the rookery will grow seriously overcrowded ; and, indeed, I have found that the one great difficulty in Arcady is to keep down the growth of plant and animal life, as well as may be. The laburnum encroaches on the copper-beach, the Scotch rose would like to mingle with the neighboring laurestinum ; the peonies, too, grow fast, and one is loth to split up their great round bushes in the interests of a clump of London Pride. Then, too, one of Dick's rabbits—a silver-gray doe—escaped last year, and a buck, a wild one, crossed the

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river from the Squire's side of the stream ; my garden had, singularly enough, been free from rabbits for many years, but now a fine strain of youngsters, brown mixed with silver-gray, is multiplying in our midst. The connoisseurs assert that the cross-breeding makes these half-castes excellent for the table ; I can at least vouch for the fact that they are well fed—chiefly on my lettuces and favorite flower borders, for the rabbit has a sure instinct for the most precious herbage in a garden. Well, it is live and let live, I suppose, in Arcady ; I thin them down as much as possible, and, after all, they give one sport of a kind.

The cats, too, grow and multiply as if by a miracle. The stable cat presents us with additions to our family at intervals monotonously regular ; Mrs. Styles's own favorite—Biddums by name, a ridiculous title given her, of course, by Cathy—is not less assiduous. With the first-named progeny the procedure is simple, being connected only with a bucket of cold water ; but Biddums is by way of being the beauty of our village cat-land, and her kittens are so uniformly pretty that Mrs. Styles could “ no more drown a baby in its cradle than murder these poor little

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innocents." Tom Lad, who distrusts cats, calls in my authority to his aid—authority, forsooth, when Mrs Styles is in question!—and I habitually give in. Personally, I have no liking for passing the death-sentence on any animal, unless it is on the far side of a gun; and the kittens do seem well-favored little beggars, as they stretch blind, pathetic faces towards the light; so the end is that they are allowed to grow to cathood. Some are given away, others stay in a nondescript fashion, and take to a wanderer's life in the garden and outbuildings; and Tom Lad shakes his head at me, and says that the one bright spot in the matter is the certainty that the birds will be lessened.

Cats, for some reason, are scarcely done justice to. Admitting that they are selfish, selfish to the core, yet they have their place in our affection. Once make them friendly with your own household dogs, as distinct from others of the hated race, and they do their share towards making the place homelike. They seem to warm a winter's night as much as the fire itself does, and there is something convincing, mellow in their purring—say, when the wind is east and all the world outside is

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held with frost—which is as comforting as an extra blanket on one's bed. That is the difference between the cat-character and the dog's; the one suggests only indoor warmth, the other takes you out under the free sky, to revel in cold and east wind and the rest, so long as there is something to be hunted. Yet, if one may venture a theory—theories are usually absurd, and, therefore, to be prefaced by that sort of mock-humility which in itself is almost as offensive—if one may suggest as much in the face of all tradition, the cat is not the tame, the warmth-loving ball of fur that we imagine it. We can, of course, render almost any animal a Sybarite by patient spoiling of his better qualities; even a man, with the healthy brutality which marks him in the unspoiled state, may be made the cattiest being in the world by domesticity of a certain type. Indeed, the men who are loudest in their abuse of cats are usually, I have noticed, of the catlike temperament; two of a trade seldom agree, and this antipathy seems to result from that curious kink in the human brain which makes us tolerate least in others the faults of which we know ourselves to be guilty.

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Given an instinctive shrinking from cats, a definite hysteria, one would not chide; the monomania is, at least, as old as Shakespeare's day; but in the ordinary man it is a little childish to cultivate a hatred of the sort. Give a cat a garden and a few acres in which to play about; talk to it as rationally as you would to a dog; deprecate its mannerisms and praise its worthier qualities, and you get a different being altogether. Biddums, the village belle, is a case in point, perhaps; she has knocked about with the dogs; she is greeted by Mrs. Styles or myself, if we chance to meet her casually, as if she were on a common footing with ourselves; and, indeed, one must learn early in one's management of animals that they resent a cut direct as much as those of our own species. The result of this—of this, coupled with a diet reasonably, not lavishly, ordered—is that Biddums is almost as wide-awake, as ready for a bit of sport, as much a comrade, as if she were a dog. She is a mighty hunter, too, and my only fear is that she should grow into that anathema of my neighbor's keepers, a poaching cat. The other day, as I was strolling past the upper pasture, I was

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aware of something moving among the reeds that fringe the tiny brooklet; the something proved to be Biddums' tail, which was erect and wavy as a pointer's on the trail. Curious to know what was going on, I climbed the fence, and found Biddums with her forefeet in the water; she scarcely glanced up to nod a recognition, so eager was she to pursue the game in hand, and for a long while I was puzzled to account for her excitement. That Biddums, who was dainty as a lady of high degree in the matter of wet feet, should be paddling i' the burn in this assiduous way, was a riddle that could only be read by patient watching. At last I saw a trout—a youngling of four ounces or so—come up the stream; Biddums saw it, too, and she grew still and awful as the Sphinx until the fish had sought shelter under a tree-root; then, with infinite quiet, she reached out one paw into the pool, and touched the trout, just gently and just hard enough to make him move out a little from the bank. One quick turn of the paw followed, a flash, and her prey lay on the bank. Tom Lad, when I told him the tale that evening, declined it altogether; and so should I have done, I confess, if I had not

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watched the adventure from the start. It was bravely done, Biddums—but beware of skill in trout-tickling, for it has led many a good man into trouble before ever a cat began to think of taking to the sport.

Biddums used to be afraid of a gun, but after being in the neighborhood of firing several times, and after finding that the operation had no bearing on her own physical comfort, she grew used to it. Then came a day when I went up to battle with the ousels who were encamped over against the pea-sticks, and Biddums chanced to be near when I brought down a blackbird. She retrieved it promptly, but not in my interests; for, without a glance at me, she made off to a sheltered corner and began the feast. Since then a gun has had a definite meaning to her, instead of being, as formerly, a curious plaything that sent out red fire and made a noise; a gun stands for a blackbird to her, and whenever she sees it on my shoulder she attaches herself to me with close affection. So it happens frequently that any onlooker of a humorous turn of mind can enjoy the spectacle of a grown man going to shoot blackbirds and of a cat who follows soberly as any retriever

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at his heels. And, believe me, Biddums can look sarcastic as the oldest sporting dog when I miss an easy shot.

She has her special sense of humor, too—of a kind I regret to say, that borders upon elementary farce. Mrs. Styles, for instance, had a row of napkins and what not drying before the hearth one afternoon when I went in to tell her that the ducklings were hatching out. Between the clothes-horse and the fire sat Biddums, looking wise and tranquil as a Hindu god; and some remnant of girlish folly bade Mrs. Styles insert her head between the linen and call to Biddums. Biddums looked, and saw a head without a body, and realized that this was pantomime; at any rate, she laughed as plainly as a cat can do—nay, she rolled and wriggled under stress of her appreciation of the joke.

“Bless you, sir, she’s not lost all her sense of fun,” said Mrs. Styles, with pride.

I thought it was wise to put a check on fancy; it seemed preposterous that a cat should really enjoy a harlequinade.

“Mrs. Styles,” I said, with the touch of gentle irony which most exasperates her, “do

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you mean to tell me that you think a cat can laugh?"

"Yes, sir, I do; and if Biddums wasn't laughing then—why, see, she's at it yet!—then I don't know what laughing means."

And I am bound to add that, in my own belief, Biddums did actually find the hidden power of laughter for one happy moment.

So far as speech goes, she can talk as fluently as any horse or dog about the place. When Tom Lad is late in bringing home the milk-pails, Biddums makes wonderful play between her saucer and any one who is at hand to offer sympathy; her remarks upon visitors to whom she has an antipathy are candid to the verge of rudeness; but, most of all, she is eloquent when an alien dog invades her premises.

Only this morning, as I came down to lunch, Biddums met me at the stair-foot; her tail was thick, her fore-feet were paddling up and down as if she were kneading the carpet into dough, her head was lifted frankly up, and she was telling me—you could read it in every movement of her shivering body—that there had been a strange dog about the place. Biddums was very angry, and she had come to me ex-

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pressly to protest against further intrusion of the sort. I chanced to look through the window that opens on to the garden at the far end of the passage, and up the road I saw a small, disheveled mongrel, limping painfully; Biddums is good at the war-cry when smallish dogs are in case, but even without the evidence of this defeated mongrel I should have been sure that I had read the cat-speech aright.

Good Biddums! The Babe may have saddled you with an absurd name, but your place in house and heart is well assured, and even Angus McLeod will tolerate your caresses, and faintly smile when you establish yourself upon his back, and curl yourself into a ball on his shaggy coat, and sleep the sleep of a just cat who knows her blamelessness. Believe me, Biddums, it is no little matter to have won the heart of a Scotch hound.

CHAPTER X

OF WANDERERS, AND THE NEED FOR MORE OF THEM

I HAD no particular intention of using my pencil or paper this morning, when I strolled out after breakfast to my accustomed seat beneath the lime tree; but the paper-pad was in my hand, from sheer habit, and a frolicsome breeze chanced to snatch at the topmost leaflets of the pile and to tear them from the clip. In recapturing the fugitives, my eye fell on some notes written weeks ago in early spring, and I renewed acquaintance in this way with that cheerful vagabond who extracted five shillings from me, and who spent the same upon his wife and children, as represented by a portly ale-jug and half-a-dozen mugs. The memory of him recurs with curious vividness, and I would cheerfully give toll again if I could have him on the seat beside me here; for he

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was of the Wanderer blood, and we have too few of the race among us to leaven the prose of these our latter days.

It is an engaging topic, this of the Wanderers, and I am tempted, lazy as I feel, to become a Wanderer myself so far as paper and pencil go. Since Ulysses went his journeys—and Ulysses was at heart as bigoted a tramp as ever left his wife and home—the Wanderer has been a lovable, brave figure in men's eyes. He is with us still, in diverse forms ; he will be with us always, so long as there is a wind in heaven and a breath of the country on the earth ; but the race is numbered now by units, not by scores, as once it was.

A day or two ago, for instance, I came across a new species of the Wanderer ; it was up on a moor-top road, and he was limned against the sky, as he came to meet me, with the precision of a Dutch painting. A fitful sound of music, moreover, came down the breeze, and presently I saw that he carried a fiddle in his hand, As he came nearer, the air took shape, and I could hear a fine tenor voice take up the strains of “Annie Laurie.”

“Maxwelton’s Braes are bonnie,” he was be-

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ginning, for the second time, when, on the sudden, he became aware of me. The absorbed and dreamy look vanished from his face, and he nodded with great friendliness.

"But not half so bonnie as old Yorkshire's braes?" he queried, tentatively.

"Not half," I assented.

He seemed a cheery soul, and I turned back with him as easily as if we had been bosom friends, long parted, and met now by chance. Indeed, I have found that, apart from all accidents of clothes and the rest, the heart of the Wanderer finds the heart of the Wanderer, as a dog will scent a friendly smell.

"You've got an old friend there?" I said, with a glance at the battered fiddle.

"Ay, he's old—and a bit rheumaticky, as old folk are. But, bless you, he's willing! You never saw a fiddle like him; he'll go all day and never tire. You see, it's this way," he added, confidentially; "I've got a dog, but I lent him to a mate for a bit of rabbiting, and it's lonesome, like, without a dog, and so I took the fiddle out instead. Did you ever hear the song of 'The Black Meas Pot and The Little Brown Jug'?"

I had not heard it, and he favored me with a

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lively rendering of what must have been one of the few remaining Yorkshire folk-songs. Alas, that I have forgotten all but the title! I persuaded him to sing it three times, and was sure that I had the words; yet somehow they escaped me afterwards, and it is only in dreams that I sometimes catch a faint remembrance of a line, a phrase, a word. It was a good song, too.

Before we parted, I gathered that my friend was a sportsman who could not afford to rent shootings of any kind; but the desire for sport—a sane one, surely, and a healthy—was stronger than the law which would have cribbed, cabined, and confined his impulses; the Bench, I imagine, would have named him a poacher, but the distinction between the sportsman and the right kind of poacher is merely a technical and legal one. He was well versed in furred and finny lore, this singer of old ballads; and he was pleased, before we bade other an affectionate farewell, to say that I seemed to have been out myself with net or “lychtering” fork.

How is it that we have no walkers nowadays? The question naturally follows on any discus-

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sion of the Wanderer. The Wanderer, he of the true blood, is always a walker. He will take a horse if need be, but at heart despises the aid of any help but such as his two legs afford. He does not travel fast—perhaps three miles and a half for every hour—but he can go all day, like my friend's fiddle. No trifle of hill or heather-land disturbs his pace ; no question of an odd ten miles or so at the end of a long journey dismays him ; he takes delight in every stride, and is of that blue Wanderer blood which, even in my recollection, was once so quick about the country-side.

There was a poetry about those walkers of the old school; whether Nature had chiseled them to a smooth shape, or whether she had left them rough-hewn as the hills they tramped, this poetry was instinct in their natures. Sure of foot, easy of stride, they could give all their leisure to the life about them ; the signs of wind and sky were clear to them ; they knew the nesting-ways of lavrock and of plover, of the stone-chat that cheeps about the upland walls ; there was no wooded dingle, by moor or vale, but they knew the ferns that grew in it, the rare flowers, the feeding tracks of hare and

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cony. No wonder that they breathed an ample air, and that they gave out again, even to chance acquaintances, something of that fine, free atmosphere on which they fed.

Your walker is always a sociable fellow ; he has the freemasonry of one who takes men and weather as he finds them, and he will talk—by stream, or highway, or in the cozy, firelit tavern-room—for as long as you need his company. He can be happy alone, content with company ; he carries in his knapsack a flask, a bit of cheese and bread, a stray addition to his toilet, and with these he can start out and know himself the rarest thing in the world of men—a freeman. He has had no freedom of the city granted him ; but a more honorable privilege, and one seldom gained—the freedom of the country—has long since been conceded to him. Consider how few fetters he carries of the sort we willingly put on under the name of worldly prosperity ; he has left his house behind him, and has no care of gear ; he can climb with the sun, and take his bite and sup at noon by some cool moorland stream, and afterwards move downward till the gloaming light warns him that the sun and he must go to bed. He may be far from house or

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inn ; what matters it ? If the night be fair, he will take the stars for roof : if wet, there is rarely a hillslope so forlorn but it has a byre of some sort dotted here and there. He is free in his very carelessness as to his lodging-place, and the men who are tied by the needs of blankets and a roof seem little short of serfs to our Freed Man of the country.

Then, too, the bigness of his heart. He is so ready to be generous, of sympathy or pocket, if need arises ; he is the friend and playmate of the children ; he will nurse in sickness—if chance has brought him to an outlying farm where sickness is—as readily as he will crack a joke in lighter moments. When he goes, there goes a certain power of wholesomeness and vigor, a power that is felt more easily than explained ; and the Wanderer—a man of idleness in the eyes of the workaday world—does more, perhaps, to sweeten the crass lump of life than all our poets and our preachers.

Surely, surely, they have learned some big, deep-rooted lesson, these Wanderers ? Charity, the key-note of well-being, has grown lusty by long comradeship with Nature, for they have learned that there is nothing big nor little in

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our Mother's eyes ; the blade of grass is equal with ourselves, and we know that Nature is laughing—indulgently, be sure—in her ample sleeve when we strut, and boast, and preen the feathers of pure reason. This thing is sure ; the anglers and the farmers, the poacher, the gipsy and the pedler, have all a wondrous spaciousness about them—a sort of wind-freshness that stirs the pulses and makes the world feel clean ; no rabbit flutters its white scut in flight, no trout leaps skywards at the fly, no field of barley curtseys to the wind, but these Men of Free Air can make you poetry round about the matter while you stand and talk to them and pass the pouch, which is the bond of comradeship.

It is this looking at the little things of life, this making of poetic episodes from the small incidents of field and wood life that renders the country so wise and acceptable a teacher. And the lesson which the country teaches us would seem, after long years, to shape itself roughly thus—that it is comparatively easy to be great, provided one has a tough conscience, a heart steeled against all attacks of fancy, a brain too big for one's body ; but to be little, worthily,

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is the finest and the rarest crown a man may win. Surely the heart of man has three great lessons to be learnt before it can be called a heart at all—the lesson of love, the lesson of pride, and, last of all, the lesson of a quiet, unboastful humility. Are things awry with you? Does Destiny seem a malign Agency whose sole effort is directed to your own undoing? Go out, with your load of troubles on your back, and walk the hills, and note how, one by one, the wind plucks off your burdens and makes sport of them. Go out and watch the grain grow big in swelling husks, and learn to understand that this is more important than your own repinings; when you have thrown your black mood off and are prepared to work—well, you may rise to the level of these growing blades.

Above all, beneath all, there is the gospel of Soil-labor; and no man can win greater honor by his life-work than by laboring faithfully, wisely, undismayedly among the good, sweet, reasonable earth. Tom Lad—who is what I may term a practical poet—will tell you that he has known honest men, a few, but never one so honest as the soil is. She may seem to play

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with the patient farmer, may seem to thwart his efforts, destroy his work's fruition for very wantonness; but the old farmer, the farmer with a heart to work and wait till understanding comes, knows well enough that, in the long run, a man earns the just price of his labor; the land will give him troubles, disappointments, to try his mettle, and afterwards she will atone to him a hundredfold if he go forward with the plow. Trust no man, if you will, but never doubt that the soil is true to her heart's core.

It would seem, indeed, that a man influences his fellows very little by what he says, by his tricks of manner or by want of them, by the food he eats and the particular taste in liquor he happens to possess; his practical effect upon his world results from the amount of fresh air he takes, from the wholesome thoughts he borrows, begs, or steals from bird and beast and tree, from the free wind of charity, and all forbearance which have blown about him in his goings to and fro. These things cling round the wind-free man, giving out fragrance, as of herbs that grow in a well-tended garden, to every passer-by. It is no credit, you will say,

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to the man ; the credit is the wind's, the sky's, the jolly, wholesome earth's; but, credit or no, he makes for good, be it much or little, in a world that is too much given to shut out winds and call them draughts.

Of the Royal Blood of Wanderers are the gipsies ; and for this reason they are always free to camp in the pasture-land beside my bit of river. I find them grateful, courteous, merry, with a splendid, well-placed pride in the honor of their women and in the laws of hospitality. They would go hungry for a day rather than touch any of my live-stock ; but, beyond my borders, no man has a claim on them, and from their spoils they bring me gifts of hare and rabbit, woodcock, pheasant, and what not. Into the origin of these gifts one naturally does not inquire, for they are sensitive, these gipsies, on points of etiquette.

It seems almost a law of Nature that to talk of any one is to bring him to your doors. There is one Wanderer of the old type who lives a mile from the village, in the little house with red tiles and latticed windows ; he has been a gentleman of leisure and a Wanderer all his life, and this morning, as I am writing idly on the

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lawn with a paper-pad on my knee and a pencil in my hand, this spruce old neighbor enters by my garden gate. He is five-and-sixty, straight and tall, careful of his dress ; he wears a bottle-green coat, cut away about his ample middle ; he carries a snuff-box, and his complexion tells of many a bottle of port that was laid down, likely, in his youth. He is in all respects a survival, such as you may meet with still in sheltered sleepy hollows ; in dress, in habits, in undimmed cheeriness of heart, he was modeled when the world was younger.

“Now, see how you youngsters waste your mornings ?” he cries.

“What would you suggest my doing, sir ?” I ask, taking a pinch of snuff from the box already open for me.

“Suggest your doing ? Why, walk, sir ! Man shows his superiority to the brutes by walking, and by walking only ; it is only man who can go on two legs—except the birds, indeed, and they’re no walkers.”

I was glad to put down paper and pencil, for I was growing tired of words—words that seem so little amid the bigness of the country and the many things one wishes to describe. For,

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after all, why should one attempt to describe such matters? Dame Nature, certainly, will never be a penny the gainer or loser by the sheaf of personalities which I am in the habit of writing about her; she is a self-possessed, dispassioned matron, this Nature of ours, and not the subtlest flattery will bring a blush to her round cheek. Yet, on the other hand, it passes many a sleepy hour for me, this habit of scribbling impressions of men, and beasts, and running streams; moreover, I am author, critic, and public in one, and it gives me childish pleasure sometimes to reflect that an edition of one copy only has been published of my book—the copy, namely, in my own possession, consisting of a few score sheets of paper fastened together by a paper-clip. It is not sumptuously bound, this rare edition; indeed, it is not bound at all; but in this very simplicity is a suggestion of something unique in the world of publishing. The editions of twenty-five and fifty (numbered copies, with the author's autograph) sink into mere bathos when compared with this *édition de luxe* of mine, limited to one subscriber—who by the way, has not yet paid himself.

My neighbor, the Wanderer, meanwhile, is

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alternately tapping his snuff-box and making holes in my turf with the end of a gold-knobbed cane.

“ Shall we start at once ? ” I ask, for this turf is precious to me, and the end of a thickish cane may do great damage in a little time.

“ Why, yes, sir. Mithridates once lost a battle by not starting at once. Life was made, sir, for those who start at once.”

He was eying me with that air—half quizzical, half grave—which forbids one to inquire at any time how far he is serious. Laziness and an indifferent memory do not allow me to decide whether Mithridates ever did lose a battle for the cause suggested, and I accept the Wanderer’s word for it, and speak tentatively of a glass of port before starting. The Wanderer, as I have said, is fond of port, and he knows the vintage which, truth to tell, I rarely tap except for him. The taste for port is dying out; I care little for it myself, and regret my lack of palate; for it seems to the quiet observer of men and manners that both the manners and the men have deteriorated since a fine taste in port was considered the second if not the first, attribute of a gentleman.

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The Wanderer takes a pinch of snuff. "A glass of port, you say?" he observes, as one who is deciding a nice question in which the universe is implicated. "Sir, you have a shrewd head on your young shoulders. Did I say start at once? I forgot that sound wine is the only useful help to walking, and Mithridates won many battles by its aid."

Belonging to a weaker generation, as I do, the statement clashed with my experience; but I went indoors, and by and by returned with a couple of glasses in one hand, and in the other —carried, oh, so carefully!—a bottle of the trusty vintage. I did not take my due share of the revelry; in fact, I scarcely had more than the one glass, for I knew my comrade's strength. It was an education in itself to sit here, with the garden scents about us and the old, old rooks above our heads, to watch this Wanderer fill his glass, and hold it to the sunlight, and sip as if the glass-rim were the lips of a mistress long-forbidden and long yearned for. The scene fitted him so exquisitely—the ancient trees, the yews fantastically clipped, the perfume of the double-stocks, all made up a quiet background to this elderly gentleman of

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a vanished school, who would regard an after-breakfast bottle as the beginning of a day's hard walk.

And a hard walk it proved, when at last we did set off. A certain tavern, famed for its game-pies and its cheeses, was our goal, and we reached it after fifteen miles of hilly road. I had been loafing too much of late, and even fifteen miles provoked a wish for rest; not in my remotest thoughts did it occur to me that the Wanderer was not thinking, like myself, of the cheese and the game-pie. We came to rest in the hall of the old tavern, and my friend ordered port, as usual; and, when this was finished, he got to his feet with a quickness that disquieted me.

"Well, sir, are you ready?" he asked.

"Quite," I answered, cheerfully. For it seemed he babbled of game-pie.

"Then let us start; we shall scarcely be home in time for dinner as it is."

"But—but—you mean to have lunch before starting?" I stammered.

"Lunch, sir? I do not hold with eating between meals. Good port, sir, was considered sufficient food between breakfast and dinner

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when I was young, and I cannot alter my ways."

I saw the whole dreary prospect then ; yet I could not confess myself a weaker vessel than this Wanderer, who had come, as it were, from the long-dead days of old. One protest I made—and that was to absent myself for five stolen minutes and snatch a mouthful of cheese and bread—and I was ready to set out with him. He walked more briskly than he had done on the outward journey—say, four to four and a half miles an hour—and by the time we reached his gate I was in no cheerful plight.

He pressed me to go in and dine with him, and during the evening consumed the best part of two bottles more.

"I feel a new man, sir," said he at parting. "It is wonderful to think what a short walk can do for one."

It *was* wonderful to think of ; and when I had taken off my boots, with care, I wondered how it came that I, who was presumably vigorous in proportion to my youth, should be punished by a walk that had cost the Wanderer nothing. He had the handicap, moreover, of at least two bottles of old port, and I felt

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ashamed. Clearly, I had idled long enough ; and to-morrow should see me start again upon one of those walking trips which I had forgotten lately in the interests of scribbling and of kitchen-gardening.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN THE MOWER WHETS HIS SCYTHE

SERIOUS as I am in my intention of running away from Arcady for a week's hard walking, I find it out of the question just now, for the meadow-grass is waving, thick and long, under a summer's breeze, and overhead is hay-makers' weather of the royal sort.

"We can't let it bide any longer, sir," says Tom Lad, coming to me on the very morning after my walk with the Wanderer. "It would be a sin and a shame, that it would, with weather made to your hand like this, and a likelihood that it'll keep in the same mind."

The walking trip must wait; that much was evident, for even Arcady has its duties.

"Very well, Tom; we'll begin to-morrow at daybreak."

"Just you and me, sir, as usual?" he asks, with the cheery grin of one who remembers past heroic days.

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"Yes, just the two of us. The farm lads have precious little notion of a scythe."

"Well, *you* have, sir. Eh, if only you could whet as well as you can mow—why, you'd be second to none, not even to myself."

This is high praise from Tom Lad, who, if he is vain in any one respect, is proud of his reputation as the first mower in the Dale. I think he likes to see me mowing, for it is one of the few kinds of manual labor whose art I have come near to mastering.

"Shall we take four days or only three?" I ask, tentatively.

"Three, sir, if you ask me; we did it last year in the time."

"And nearly broke our backs, Tom Lad. However, we'll try for it."

We go to bed betimes, and Mrs. Styles rouses me literally with the dawn. A good breakfast, a pipe on the way to the low meadow, and I am as ready as Tom is to begin.

Oh, the joy, the irresponsible, free gaiety of that early walk across the beaded grass! The chatter of the birds, the rose-washed freshness of the sky, the gallant uprising of the warm, sweet scents of earth and green stuff; the sense

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of being beforehand with the work to come; all these are matters that must be experienced before the sweets of Arcady are fully known. Tom Lad renews his youth again, and tells old tales, and wears a face as cheerful as the sun's as we go down together and stand within the meadow-gate.

"Look, sir, how prideful it stands," he says, waving his hand towards the smiling grass. "It like as it says, 'Come on, and see which of us is best, ye or me.' Well, sir, we'll show yond meadow which is best before so long."

Tom takes his scythe in his hand as if it were some precious living thing, and whets it to a nicety. I do my best to get my own blade ready. Tom starts his swath, and I follow with the next, and the work is going in good earnest. There's music goes with us all down the long, wide lanes we cut—that soft, recurring *swish* which makes a man's heart blithe. The reek of the grass comes up to meet one. The steady back-and-forth of the curved blade is the poetry of muscle.

There is no other exercise, save hunting, that can compare with scything. To scent the good grass fragrance, to feel the blade go

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sliding with a soft, compelling magic through the sward—the animal joy of it alone is mighty. Down we go to the swath-end, then start afresh; the sweat shines gloriously on Tom's keen, smiling face, with that "uplifted" air it always wears at mowing time; a lark gets up and sings aloud of the wholesome sweetness of the world. Believe me, it is very good to rise at daybreak with a scythe!

A couple of hours before noon we finish a swath, and turn to find Mrs. Styles coming through the gate. She carries cheese and bread and a mighty tankard of brown ale, and she surveys us with a quiet, but evident, desire to belittle our achievement of the morning.

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much to show, in a way of speaking, for all the time you've taken," she observes, setting down the cheese and ale, and pointing to the grassy lane that we have made. "Look at you, Tom! I think I never saw a man just as wet as you are."

"Thee bide, lass, till nightfall," chuckles Tom Lad, "and you'll see us wetter by the half."

"I'll be bound; and your clothes will have to be set out before the fire, filling my kitchen

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with steam, and not getting dry, likely, by to-morrow. I always do say you might as well have been in the burn, and have done with it, as go mowing."

"I should well like to be in the burn this minute, and that's the truth," laughs Tom, as he dashes his sleeve once more across his forehead. "Now, lass, what have you brought? Cheese and bread—oh, ay, and a spice-loaf. Shall we be making a start, think ye, sir?" he breaks off.

My friend the Wanderer, if he had talked of "making a start," would have implied the beginning of a fresh swath; but Tom Lad's regard is altogether fixed upon the coming meal. Cake and cheese is a North-country dish, I believe; and it would seem a pity that it were not more widely known, for at ten of the morning—if you have been up at daybreak—it has no equal for the making of a sound and lasting meal. But, then, what matters the kind of food, so long as there is plenty? Any dish would taste ambrosial this morning, and any ale would smack of nectar.

We make an end at last, and stretch ourselves at full length on the grass, and light a pipe of

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sheer content, while Stylesey takes the remnants of our feast away.

“ You’re a good one to lie on your back, Tom —the best I ever saw,” is her farewell.

Tom Lad turns lazily on his side, and watches her ample figure dwindle to nothingness behind the trees ; then he chuckles, quietly, decorously.

“ She has a long tongue, eh, sir? But, bless you, she means nothing. I get like as if I don’t hear what she says—as if she were a trickle of water, as you might say, that goes ‘ babble—babble—babble ’ till you forget to listen to it.”

“ Yet you are happy, Tom Lad,” I say, scarcely knowing I have uttered the thought.

“ Oh, ay, sir! I’m out o’ doors, you see, most all my time, and it’s healthy, same as the greenhouse I was telling you of the other day.”

I laugh at Tom’s solution of his marriage difficulties, and give myself up to study of the sky. Up, and up, and up the blue vault mounts, growing deeper, more mystical, the longer one’s regard is fixed on it. A lark hangs speck-like in the middle-distance ; far off towards the gray horizon a flock of rooks floats by, like so many penciled lines and dots, reminding one of boyhood’s first attempts at

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drawing, when rooks in flight were always chosen as the subject—one curly line to the left, another to the right, and the thing was done!

Angus McLeod, the Scotch hound, disturbs my reverie. He has missed me, apparently, on rousing himself from his lordly sleep, and has followed me to see what sort of work or play I have on hand. Assuming from my attitude that lying on my back is all my business for the day, he sighs contentedly and stretches himself beside me. Tom's dog has been with us from the start, and presently the setter joins us, his tail high in air and his nose down, as if a hayfield were as difficult to find as a partridge or a cony. Last of all, just as we are stretching ourselves in readiness to begin again, old Flick—poor, crippled gentleman, with gout—comes waddling in at the gate; and Flick has to be made much of before we begin, for this journey of love that he has taken is a long one for him and a tedious.

At last we begin again. The sun gets up to the top of his climb, and drops by easy stages towards the west. The swaths go dropping, dropping, and I find it painful to keep up with

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Tom the Tireless. Every moving muscle, disused for a year, begins to utter protests ; it does not matter—for, if I drop, I do not mean to let Tom Lad have the laugh of me. If only I could get a keener edge to my blade, and so save a good half of my labor, it would be easier to mow level with him.

“Getting tired, sir?” he asks, with seeming kindness, as he stops to wipe his scythe with a handful of grass.

“Not a bit, Tom. I feel as if we were just beginning.”

“That’s well, sir, for we haven’t finished by a goodish bit.”

Just as I am nearing the end of the next swath, and feeling that even pride cannot keep me up much longer, Mrs. Styles comes down to us again, like a plump fairy-godmother who brings good gifts in the nick of time.

I do not ask if we shall do just one more swath before our meal ; I simply lay my scythe down, stretch myself carelessly, as if it were a matter of indifference as to whether I should stop or go on with the work, and stroll across to Stylesey. She has brought us a shepherd’s pie this time, in a covered dish, and her allow-

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ance of ale is, if anything, a trifle more liberal than before; for it is a prime article of faith with Tom Lad, and with myself, that long drinks and many are essential to good mowing.

“It stands to reason, sir,” he says each year at time of hay-harvest; “it stands to reason that, if a body gets wet through from his inwards outwards, in a way of speaking—why, he must fill up the gap.”

So we fill up the gaps, and Mrs. Styles is pleased, for once, to admit “that we have mown a middling bit.”

We take a clear hour off this time; and I am privileged to know—only in a greater degree, for the effort has meant more to me—that joy in ease which farm men have at dinner-time. It is too much trouble almost—but not quite—to draw one’s pipe-smoke through and to send it out again in a lazy, sunlit stream.

“ When the mower whets his scythe,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,” .

I find myself murmuring. For the true Miltonic Milton, with his thunderbolts and spacious dreams, is never half so great, so sweetly

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English and convincing, as in this picture of an English summer.

“Ay, when he whets his scythe—*if he can,*” puts in Tom Lad, catching up the words.

This is the practical aspect of the poetry; and I wonder indolently if Milton himself half realized what that easy, gliding line would mean to men who understand a scythe. No man can be said to mow at all unless he has learned by intuition that art of whetting which is born with a man, or not, like poetry or a pretty taste in claret. In my own case, I am happy enough so far as the scything goes; I can get the swing and the easy pressure of the handles which secures a clean cut and a low—but I cannot get a razor edge. Tom Lad admits that nine men out of ten would be glad to get my sort of edge to a scythe; but, alas, Tom is the tenth man, and I know, from mowing behind him, that the difference between our powers of whetting is a vital one. That difference, indeed, is accountable for my punishment towards the end of our morning’s work; Tom Lad himself is fresh as a buttercup with the dew of dawn upon it, and he looks sideways at me, time and time, with a pitying glance.

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The hour's rest, however, sets me right again ; and the dogs—all except the collie and poor, faithful Flick—desert us when they see that we are going tediously on with work instead of taking them afield.

Swish-swish, and the fall of dropping swathes till tea-time brings another respite ; then on again till the last edge of dark. Just before we finish, as I am pushing my blade through with an energy begotten solely of despair, there is a whirr of wings immediately in front of me, and a corn-crake gets up almost underneath my blade. Half-flying, half-scurrying on her long legs, she seeks shelter in the hedge, and I stoop to find her nest, bare as the ground it rests on, with a dozen eggs close-packed together.

Tom Lad halts in his mowing for a moment. “I’m glad she’s safe away, sir,” he says ; “last year, if you call to mind, I mowed a corn-crake’s legs clean off before ever I knew where she was. They’re good sitters, is th’ birds—I will say that for them.”

I, too, am glad that the steadfast bird has been saved from accident ; for who is there among us who does not find in the corn-crake’s harsh, pathetic note some intimate whisper from the

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Land of Pure Romance? Strange though it is, the birds with the harshest notes—the rook, the corn-crake, and the owl—are those who lie most close to our affections; and of the three, the corn-crake is perhaps the dearest. What far-off days she conjures up, as if by magic, this long-legged, would-be mother! Forgotten scents, of maying-time and haying-time, come back to us at the first sound of her voice; she croaked long since, when one sought moths—to add to one's collection—among the twilit meadow-lands; she croaked at a later day, when adolescence sought to fasten impossible perfections on some favored lady; she croaked two nights ago, when I wandered meadowwards, and wondered if the Babe would ever marry, and told myself, with passionate assurance, that I must save her from the madness and keep her—why, a comrade still.

And I might have killed this vessel of romance, killed her by one unlucky stroke of a tired scythe. Well, I did not kill her, and I am passing glad. When the corn-crake fails to voice her sorrow in a discordant key—and the bird is growing scarcer—we shall have lost one at least of the keynotes of our English music.

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We finish our swath, Tom Lad and I, and wander homeward in great peace of mind. To be sure, I ache from heel to crown ; to be sure, I find the short walk endless, and the scythe upon my shoulder is a burden grievous to be borne; but the day's work is done, and well done, and all the scars are honorable ones.

Who shall sing of the glories of the tub that follows? Not I, for one, since the joy of it leaves me too lazy and too peaceful to play about with words. Hot water first, then a quick douche of cold—a casual change into flannels—and I am ready for Mrs. Styles's supper, which is, as it were, the goal and crown of this Arcadian day.

I will be honest, however, and tell what the morrow's dawn reveals, when Stylesey rouses me once again. Even in Arcady men's muscles are made much like other people's and I can scarcely move a limb when I first attempt to get up. I do not ache in this or that place ; I am just one comprehensive ache, of a fierce, peremptory kind, that tortures me at each fresh movement. Yet I have another long day's mowing before me !

Somehow I scramble into my bath, dress

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myself with pain and heart-searching, and hobble round the garden before breakfast, by way of protest against my aches.

"Stiff, sir?" queries Tom Lad, as we go down together to the meadow.

"Oh, a little," I answer airily; "nothing but what a swath-length will cure."

But Tom smiles quietly to himself, for my condition is perceptibly a sad one.

Truly, there is virtue in that old prescription of "the hair of the dog;" for ten minutes I am miserable; for a half-hour longer I feel mildly chastened; then, lo, I am swinging, free and joyous, behind Tom Lad, and ready to fight on till sundown once again! Nay, as the day wears on, I feel a better man than yesterday, and Tom is moved to grudging praise.

The corn-crake's eggs have disappeared, and we suspect the village boys of pilfering them; but by and by the scene of yesterday is repeated; the mother-bird gets up within a foot of Tom Lad's scythe, and there, almost under his left boot, are the dozen eggs which the long-suffering landrail has removed, one by one, in the night hours.

"Well, I've heard of their shifting their eggs

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like yond," says Tom ; " but I never saw it myself before. How does she carry them, sir ? "

I cannot answer the question, nor have I found any one who can. It has been suggested that she carries them in her beak, but this would seem unlikely, if not impossible ; a more likely theory, to my mind, is that she rolls them gently over the soft under-grass until they lie once more in shelter of the uncut blades.

There is no lack of these and similar incidents, no lack of glimpses into the hidden lives of such birds and beasts as choose the meadows for their haunts. Many tragedies of field-mice we have—the mother cut to pieces, the furry youngsters left orphaned in their nest—and these serve to lend that spice of bitter to the day which is needed to round off its happiness. Once, too, we come upon a skylark's nest, full of unhatched eggs ; and this is a rare happening, for the lark is wiser than the landrail, and usually she rears her brood long before there is a risk of scythes among the growing grass.

Ah, well, I am loth to leave the chronicle of our Three Days' Fight ; for battle it is, of a stubborn kind, to get through the appointed task within the time. Even Tom Lad begins

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to move more slowly, to pause more often in elaborate wonder that the view should be so grand ; and, if he wished to falter, what of me, who am striving all the while, not to be Tom's equal, but to struggle through with decent credit to myself ?

The afternoon " drinkings," however—heavens, how sweet a quart of ale can be !—give us courage for a last assault ; the sun dips low at last, and leaves a stain of crimson on his path ; the last glow of the west fades down to gray and palest amber ; the moon floats up above the eastward hedge, white, plump, and tranquil ; the last swath is done.

" There ! " cries Tom Lad, as he flings down his scythe. " Did I say we'd do it in three days, sir, or didn't I ? Lord, but we've worked, you and me ! ' Twould have taken hired men five days if an hour to do what we've done."

I cannot any way describe the tone in which Tom Lad speaks of " hired men " ; but it makes me laugh to-night.

" Tom Lad," I suggest, tentatively, as I feel great drops go trickling down my face, " mowing is thirsty work."

" Ay, it's dry, sir ; not but what it can be

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cured, as the man said when he drew the spigot and put his mouth to the bung-hole."

"Well, suppose you run across and bring a quart of ale or so, and a couple of glasses. It's too fine to go indoors just yet."

I stretch myself on the grass, and Tom Lad, when he returns, finds a neighboring stump on which to rest.

"You haven't earned all that sweat, sir, in a manner of speaking," he begins.

"How so, Tom?"

"You know very well when it comes to swinging a scythe, but it's the whetting, sir—the whetting, as I always told you."

No man is a hero to his gardener, and long use has inured me to this sort of criticism.

"See, here, Tom," I say, with tolerable firmness, "I have worked twice as hard as you, though you've covered as much ground."

"That may be, sir, but I'd like to know how it comes about."

"Because you can get a razor-edge to your scythe, and I can't. You have only to show your blade to a tuft of grass and it falls of its own accord; I have to plow through it."

Tom Lad blew the froth from his ale; he

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made a goodly picture—a clean, lithe couple of yards of manhood—as he sat with the reddening sun in his face and the nut-brown liquor in his hands.

“There you’re right, sir,” he says. “Whet your scythe and your grass is mown, as poor Joe Earnshaw used to say. You’ll remember Joe? He died of the ‘Titus last back-end, and a bonnier mower never stepped.”

I remembered him well, and by and by Tom went forward with the tale which seemed to lie at the bottom of his glass.

“Joe was the best whetter of a scythe that ever I set eyes on. He liked as he witched his blade, for I could never see that he did much to it—just stroked it, like, with his whetstone, as you might stroke a cat. You never heard how he went mowing up in Wharfedale? Well, it’s a tale that will bide telling again. He was a littlish chap, was Joe—slim and narrow, too—and he carried a scythe as short as himself. In Wharfedale, I should say, they’re a big lot of men, and they like a long blade.”

A stray cockchafer blundered into Tom Lad’s glass, and he paused to remove the offender.

“Well, Joe went up, as I said, to a spot called

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Aptrick, to help a sort of relation of his—on his mother's side—to mow a ten-acre meadow. T' other chap—they called him Preston, so far as I can mind—had got a lot of Irishmen, and West Country folk, and what not, to help him at hay-harvesting, as well as his own lot of farm-men; and when Joe comes, with his short body and his short scythe, to mow alongside of them they begins to laugh. ‘We'll take two swaths to thy one, lad, so don't thee worry,’ they said. ‘Let's see ye do it,’ says Joe. And Preston laughed then, for he knew Joe Earnshaw well, and he'd seen him wield a scythe.”

Tom Lad pauses for a long gulp and a deep, and slowly wipes his lips. He seems to picture the scene to himself, for his eyes are full of glee, though as yet his face is grave and tranquil.

“ Well, they make a start, as you might say, and Joe is chosen as leader, just for a bit of fun, as they fancy. You'll call to mind, sir, what a meadow looks like at mowing-time—the leader striding down his swath, the next man following a bit behind and to his right hand and so right on to the last chap in. Well, Joe starts, and he says to himself—so he told me afterwards—‘ Joe,’ says he, ‘ you're Airedale

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born, and you've got to show these long-legged Wharfe chaps what a little 'un can do.' He'd got his blade as sharp as my missus's tongue—begow, it's saying a lot!—and he just strode forward as if he were walking for a frolic. T' other chaps came panting behind, trying to keep up with him; and Preston, watching it all from his gig at the top of the field, got red i' the face wi' laughing."

Another pause, a deepening of the merriment in Tom Lad's eyes, a second wiping of the lips.

"Well, Joe finishes his swath, and steps backward-like to start another; he just strokes his blade with the hone, in the way I told you of—t' other chaps were whetting like mad, and mopping at their silly foreheads—and then he goes down and down his next swath, like cutting butter. By and by, he overtakes th' last man, and he calls out, 'Hi, lad, I want to pass; I'm getting chilly-like mowing at this slow pace.' Then t' other chap stands by, fair beat wi' wonderment, and Joe passes him, still as easy as a cat lapping cream, and he leaves a nice thick bit o' grass at his left hand for t' other lad to mow through. And Preston, sit-

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ting in his gig, laughed all over his fat body, and Joe stands quiet at the bottom of his swath. ‘Now, Wharfedale lads,’ says he, ‘will you come over Airedale way and learn to mow a swath?’ Poor Joe! He was a little ‘un, but there wasn’t any waste about him. Yet ‘Titus took him—as it will take ye and me, sir, if we sit telling tales here with this power of sweat on us.’

Slowly we take ourselves homeward through the moonlight. Behind us the mother corn-crake wails above the eggs which we have twice uncovered; from Mrs. Styles’s kitchen comes a cheery light, and a cheery odor greets us as we draw nearer.

What pipes we shall smoke to-night, Tom Lad and I, when supper has been well dispatched!

CHAPTER XII

A LITTLE SENTIMENT, EXCUSABLE AFTER HARD LABOR WITH THE SCYTHE

I AM dawdling to-day, frankly dawdling. And who shall say me nay, after three dawns that have seen me rise for the mowing, three gloamings that have surprised me, still with a scythe in hand? I mean to dawdle thoroughly, and that is, in its way, a difficult achievement. The seat under the chestnuts, I find, is a trifle hard when I attempt to fit my aches and stiffness to its corners; so I choose the grass instead, and prop my paper-pad against a book, and begin to scribble with entire content.

Some impulse—a rash one, you may be sure—bids me try to express the meaning of that phrase, “An English Maid.” Perhaps it is because I caught a glimpse of Cathy not long ago, as she crossed the Hall garden up above; for the Babe has a trick of suggesting foolish

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and unlikely exploits and, indeed, it would be an exploit to succeed in the forlorn hope which I have undertaken. How can one hedge in with meaning this elusive word of "girl," which always brings the daintiness of lavender to one, which is, like "home," peculiarly an English heritage? A something buoyant, lissome—proud, withal, yet modest as the summer wind that stirs old-fashioned gardens, and delicate as peach bloom that has known the fostering summer winds—all this the English girl should be. And yet these are but the beginning of that fairyland which the phrase opens out to us; crush all the tenderness, the cleanly English pride, the scent of meads at haying-time, into some happy phrase known only to the dwellers on the Heights—and you may hold the meaning. For my part, I abandon the attempt; it was folly to undertake it at the first, and only that brief glimpse of the Babe, as she went to tend her garden flowers just now, encouraged me to persevere. Only, one thing I know—that violets bloom among us still, in places where the hedgerows lie and sleep, far from the smoke and uproar of the world—that there are girls—English girls—

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among us still—that the man's heart has always, and will always, turn to this old, sweet type of girlhood that is accounted dead, because she lifts no voice amidst the clamor of her sisters.

Have I been describing Cathy all this while—Cathy herself, under cover of that phrase “An English Maid”? It may well be so, and yet I am disquieted; something is wanting in my life, but surely—why, surely, it is only another Alderney, a new strain of cauliflower, a pansy bloom that will delight enthusiasts? These things, with a rod and gun, have been enough aforetime—what ails me now?

I grow tired of idleness and paper on the sudden, and determine to go in search of Tom Lad; he always proves a wholesome physic when one grows a little sentimental. Tom, however, when I find him in the stableyard, is looking less cheery than his wont, and I indulge in gentle railery.

“Are you done up, Tom Lad, after our three days' holiday?” I suggest.

Tom smiles in faint derision. “No, sir! It takes more than a bit of frolic to do that. I am thinking of the bullock, sir.”

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Poor Tom Lad, he has a tender heart, and sometimes it causes him great inconvenience. I know in a moment what is in his mind ; for the bullock has to be delivered into alien hands to-day, and soon he will be no more than a foolish assortment of joints and steaks.

"We cannot keep him, Tom," I suggest.

"Well, no, we can't, sir ; but I've got used to his ways, and he has some tricks of his own that sort of go to a chap's heart when it comes to killing. Besides, he looked at me this morning when I went in to feed him for the last time—and he seemed to know—and something got into my throat."

I don't attempt to discuss the situation ; I simply leave Tom to recover from his qualms, and try, with would-be firmness, to silence my own ; for it is a sad, insistent fact of life in Arcady, that sometimes one's friends, feathered and four-footed alike, have to be killed.

It does not matter what animal you rear for table, it is of no consequence if you protest at the beginning that the thing is a practical matter, and that you will not let sentiment creep in—the result is always the same. Little by little you begin to watch the new-comer;

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you "learn his ways," as Tom put it, despite yourself ; it looks to you as its natural protector and friendly ally.

Even the pigs come under the same head ; for pigs are a cheerful race, though, like the cats, they are misunderstood. Hide your pigs away in a dismal, unconsidered corner of your grounds and treat them cavalierly, and, of course, you can insure the worst results ; but treat them after a human fashion, give them a chance to live in cleanliness and good repute, and they become a new race. But you will find it hard, when the time comes for them to be transmuted into bacon, to sign their death-warrant ; you will remember that you have watched them grow from piglet prettiness to pig rotundity ; you will recall engaging tricks they had as youngsters ; and for a little while you will not look your breakfast rasher in the face, for to eat it smacks of cannibalism.

Tom, indeed, has a strange story in this connection of a farmer he knew high up the Dales. I do not vouch for the story, but Tom Lad is, in the main, a truthful person when he tells a tale.

"He was fearful soft-hearted, was John
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Preston, I should tell you, sir," he begins. "A good worker, a good farmer—but he got that fond of his live-stock that he couldn't bide to part with it. Once, I mind, he bought a half-dozen geese in September, and he said to his wife that they'd fatten 'em one by one, killing three or four, you understand, as green geese, and leaving t' others for Christmas; for John Preston was as fond of a bit of goose flesh as ever I saw a man. Well, the time came for killing the first of the grand lot; and Preston rubbed his chin, in a way he had when bothered, and told his wife they were too good for such-like work, and that he'd keep them all to make rare birds at Christmas; he could sell what they didn't want, he said, and make good profit by it. His wife knew well enough, but Preston didn't, that he'd grown so fond of his six geese, through watching of 'em, and feeding of 'em, and talking to 'em, that he couldn't for his life have put his pen-knife in the throat of one of 'em.

"Well, Christmas comes, and Preston rubs his chin again, and says he reckons he'll keep 'em all for laying i' the spring. His wife says nothing—being a little, quiet body who knew

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her place—and spring comes. And then it seems that, by some mischance or other, they were all ganders, and not a chance of an egg among the whole lot. But Preston had got fond and fonder still about them ; and the end was he kept 'em all, eating their heads off out of his pocket, as you might say—and, for aught I know, they're there to this day."

Tom laughs as he tells this tale, and so do I ; but what of the bullock that we would give so much to keep from out the butcher's hands ?

Ah, well ! It is no fit topic for a summer's day, and I am being far less idle than I meant to be. Suppose, instead of sorrowing about the tragedies of pigs and kine, we talk of weather and the changing seasons? For a new wonder is upon me, as I realize that summer is full-fledged at last, to think of the callow youthfulness of a spring which yesterday seemed, like Cathy, not eager to "grow up." The wonder is a new one, to besure ; yet each summer it has come, each summer it has shown itself, this quiet surprise, in a new aspect. Perhaps the greatest joy of Arcady lies in the certainty that no day will be like the last, no

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season like its elder brother of last year. When a new spring comes in, when another summer opens wide its doors, they are as old friends returned to us after travel, who bring a wealth of new experience, new turns of wit, new bits of well-digested philosophy, from the lands beyond our ken. The seasons, by slow degrees, grow to have a shape and personality to one: spring is a capricious maid, with a wanderer's tastes, who comes to stay with us for as much of the year as she can spare from foreign travel, and it is an alluring, never-to-be-answered question—where does the blithesome lassie go, when she packs her frills and gauzy raiment and leaves the new guest, summer, in undivided possession of our hospitality? Does she go, this particular spring of ours, to the lands where the faint heart swallow hides himself in winter-time? Does she flit, dainty, diaphanous, heedless of aught but her own will, along the blue shores of the South? Being more than a name—possessing personality and a shape, as we are sure she does—it is clear that the daintiest maid on earth must make arrangements of some sort for her lodging during nine months of the year. Again one asks, "Where

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is our frolic spring? And is she as safe among foreigners as in our cleanly English lanes and gardens?" Truly, it seems inexpedient, if not dangerous, for one so youthful and so irresponsibly fair to go abroad unchaperoned.

"There's Jim, the butcher's boy, here, sir. He says you want to buy some pullets."

I look up to find Mrs. Styles in front of me; and little by little I descend from my airy heights of fancy, lay down my paper-pad and pencil on the garden-chair, and address my mind to pullets.

The butcher's boy—a wide-mouthed imp, with hair as red as a stormy sundown—is at the gate. He has brought a dozen pullets for my inspection, and we proceed in solemn state to the hen-house. Here I examine the pullets, one by one, and I attempt to overawe the red-headed youth by that air of calm, aloof condescension which, I have noticed, is the true manner of the man who trades in fowls. To be sure, I know the patois of fowl-lore, I can trust myself to comment on the points which need comment, and to approximate to the correct age of a hen ; but, underneath this superficial culture, I am really a hopeless duffer. I have

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not the gift, that is all, and, unless you can judge of a fowl by instinct, not all your earnest striving shall give you the better of the bargain.

The red-headed boy, however, seems impressed by my handling of the pullets ; and the flattery pleases me. It is strange that one always prefers unearned admiration to that which is founded on a sure basis.

"A poor lot," I say at last, in sepulchral tones. "One and fourpence each, your father said ? Why, they ought to be twice the weight at that price."

"Father says as pullets is scarce to come by this year," ventures the boy.

"Oh, does he? Well, tell father to step down this evening, and we will bargain for them."

I know, in my secret heart, that I shall hand over my bargaining to Tom Lad ; but it amuses me now to believe that I shall—I, alone—wage a Saga-battle with my friend the butcher as to the price of these same pullets.

An interlude occurs at this point—an interlude that would be known as "business" in stage-craft. The red-headed boy has omit-

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ted to latch the door securely ; a puff of wind half opens it, and two of the birds are speeding fast across my garden. I wither the hapless youngster with a glance, and we set off in pursuit.

It is heating work, this chasing of nimble pullets ; I doubt if any one knows just how heating it can be, unless he has given the pastime a fair trial. Yet it has its sporting side, and judgment and finesse are more important elements of victory than mere speed of limb. One of the fugitives is soon brought into captivity, but the other, a speckled Plymouth Rock, defies me. She has forgotten that she is a tame bird, reared by decent parents ; she feels the spirit of the long-dead ancestors wake in her, and grows for the moment a wild-fowl, fleet of leg and fleet of wing.

We soon abandoned the idea of capture ; plainly our only hope lay in driving her toward the hen-house, and with this object in view, we stalked the lady with an elaboration of feints and quietly stealing marches that surely showed good generalship. At last we were within measurable distance of success ; half the distance was covered, and the pullet was moving

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quietly forward in the direction wished for. We did not risk defeat by undue haste, and while we followed soberly, the truant stayed for a leisurely moment and lunched on my finest strain of buff carnations. I bore this with equanimity, for my one object of life at the moment—how absorbed one can be even in a hen-hunt!—was to secure the person of that errant fowl. Slowly, slowly, we drove her towards the door, already opened by the boy; then, without warning, she doubled, ran for dear life past me, and all our work had gone for nothing.

“Come along!” I called to the boy. And to myself I said, not loudly, but with desperate quiet, “I’ll see this thing through, if I spend the day at it.”

The chase went forward so keenly that I did not hear the sound of wheels along the drive. I had just executed a brilliant flank movement—involving a vault over some five-foot railings, a quick run afield and quicker homeward race, when I was aware of a ripple of laughter. In front of my door was a carriage, and in the carriage sat a neighboring Archdeacon and his wife. The laughter—it was quite unrestrained,

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so unrestrained as to be tearful—came from Mrs. Neville ; for never, to my knowledge, had the Archdeacon been known to smile. Another gentle ripple sounded from behind, and I glanced round to find that Cathy and the Squire were approaching also.

" You ran very well indeed," said Mrs. Neville, sweetly.

" I believe I did," I answered, with what assumption of coolness I could muster.

The good lady shakes her head at me as she steps out, as much as to say that I have the reputation of being mad, and that I must be forgiven any little eccentricity. It is so comforting to be reputed mad ; one is saved so many social worries, forgiven so many social indolences.

" Murphy, you ran splendidly ! " cries Cathy, coming up and giving me her hand.

" Ha, ha ! Very fine—quite a remarkable run, my boy—in at the death too," chuckled the Squire.

So here was I, with four people regarding me in an interested way ; and the Babe, I knew, was watching with keen enjoyment to see how I should comport myself under the trying cir-

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cumstances. As a matter of fact, I did not comport myself at all ; I just ushered them into the house, and rang for tea, and proceeded to talk of Church and State with the Archdeacon, who never smiles—no, not even at the spectacle of a hen-hunt.

My more formal visitors departed, by and by, and the Squire rubbed his hands together gleefully ; he is very much of a boy still, and I have ceased to wonder that Cathy and he and I are such perfect chums.

“ Fine fellow, the Archdeacon,” he said ; “ very fine fellow, but a trifle heavy in the going, eh ? Mouth a trifle hard, eh ? One has to saw at the bit. My boy, you nearly poisoned me with that tea of yours—oh, the tea is well enough, as tea, but I never touch it—bad for my nerves, my doctor says.”

He laughs the jolly laugh that comes from sheer good health of mind and body ; then he smiles secretly, and rubs his hands again, and, “ I daren’t ask for it when our friend was here,” he adds, confidently, “ but don’t you think—eh?—just a dash of whisky in a little soda—eh ? ”

“ Dad, please remember that I have brought

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you on a state call," Cathy interposes; "besides, Murphy is quite, quite young yet, and the example—Daddy, think of the example!"

"Ah, true!" murmurs the Squire, while I set about mixing him a measure. "Gently with the soda, boy! True, it never does to touch this kind of thing in the afternoon, my boy, unless you belong to my generation; you haven't the physique nowadays."

"Suppose I try, sir?" I suggest. "You will feel lonely unless I keep you company."

There is the sound of wheels on the drive, a hurried ring, and the Archdeacon reappears.

"Ah, I left a book here—on this table, as I think—" he begins, apologetically.

The book is certainly lying on the table; so likewise are two tumblers, filled with a liquid that is unmistakably yellow in tint. The Squire gives me a despairing glance; the Archdeacon looks grave beyond his wont, and cannot politely avert his gaze from the accusing glasses; at last he stumbles out with more apologies.

"That is where one's luck comes in," the Squire murmurs; "our reputation, boy, is gone."

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Perhaps it is, but the three of us, remembering the look on the Archdeacon's face, laugh happily. For of such sort are the comedies of Arcady.

CHAPTER XIII

I JOIN THE WANDERERS

THERE is no doubt that work begets energy, and to-night, after Cathy and the Squire have gone—the Squire still chuckling over his illicit whisky-and-soda and the detection that came so speedily—I feel a vast desire to stretch my limbs. I remember, too, how easily the Wanderer tired me out the other day, and it seems good that I should start to-morrow. The resolve is made more easily, perhaps, because I took kindly, long ago, to the first lesson a Wanderer must learn—to travel without any baggage, except such as he can carry on his back. A razor, a tooth-brush, a flask—there is nothing really necessary, after all, but such trifles as can be carried in the lightest knapsack. If you need a clean shirt, a collar—well, buy it at the first shop you find, and leave the discarded linen as a legacy to your tavern. It is

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misguided economy that tells you this is waste; for the method leaves you free, and no freedom is dearly bought at the price of an occasional shirt and a new collar every day. Nothing troubles the man without baggage ; he is free to change his mind six times a day if it so pleases him, and whether he dines and sleeps at Edmonton or Ware is a matter of the least importance.

There is a lazy side to energy, I find, and the greater the energy the greater is one's laziness on certain lines. If, now, I had a bag to pack in view of to-morrow's journey, if I had had to forward it by train to some appointed place, knowing that I must, willy-nilly, gravitate constantly towards the place of the Bag, why, then, I think, I should never have started at all. As it is, there is nothing to be done, except put a few trifles in my knapsack, eat a good breakfast, and start as lightly as if I were going to the village for a tin of tobacco.

Stay, though! There is one other obstacle to surmount ; and that, I need not say, is Mrs. Styles. I realized the gravity of the obstacle when I came down to breakfast this morning, and told her that I meant to be away for a

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week or so. Stylesey protested openly, for it pleases the good woman to imagine me a child—and therefore to be thwarted, as children are, in all my dearest wishes. For any man to set his mind upon a thing is sure proof to Mrs. Styles that the thing is wrong, and so, as she set down my dish of bacon and fussed about the toast-rack, she began to point out to me some twenty reasons why I should stay at home.

"The weather is none too good, sir; better put off your trip till the wind changes," she began.

"I don't care about the weather, Mrs. Styles; it is as good fun to get wet through as to keep dry, if you look at the thing properly."

"Ah, well, you're young, sir—asking your pardon, and you don't know what you are laying up for yourself. One wetting through spells a week of rheumatics, sir, later on, and I'd like you to think of that, for I knew your mother before you."

This was Mrs. Styles's crushing argument; though why the fact of having been in service with my dear mother should give her the right to make my lightest whim seem despicable by

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this appeal is a subtlety which I have never fathomed.

"You wouldn't have me die of atrophy?" I suggest, mildly. "It is worse than 'rheumatics,' Mrs. Styles."

The good word "atrophy" has done me service, as I knew it would. Mrs. Styles, like all of us, fears the unknown, and big words are apt to overawe her.

"Would you like an omelette to follow, sir?" she asks, with the air of a mother who watches her first-born bent upon his own destruction, and who wishes to do all she can for him—a first rehearsal of the funeral baked-meats, so to speak, before he sets out on his journey.

"You are a pearl among women, Mrs. Styles; an omelette would just round off the feast."

"Small use being a pearl, sir—if you'll excuse my saying it—when you can't get folk to see you're in the right. If your mother were alive now—but there! You never listened to her, either; it was only your father's cane—the one with the horn handle, sir, if you remember—that made you change your mind."

Mrs. Styles is vastly diverting. Indeed, I

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neglected my morning paper altogether in the effort to draw forth arguments, and pleas, and prophecies touching this innocent walking trip of mine. There were so many duties awaiting me here at home, if Mrs. Styles were to be believed; her point of view had changed entirely, and, whereas at ordinary times she scouted the bare idea of my being useful in my narrow sphere, she discovered now that the new calf could not exist without my supervision, that the kitchen garden would go to wrack and ruin if I left it for a week, that my intimate knowledge of goslings was needed at a critical time. Finally, when I did get off at last—the omelette proved very comforting—the good woman stood on the doorstep and watched me with the tragic front of a Cassandra—a remarkably plump and apple-cheeked Cassandra.

As I went up the lane, I began to ponder on the ways of Mrs. Styles. This trip of mine was surely innocent to the point of bathos; it was only her instinct of contrariety that bade her weave a tragedy from such slight threads. It is amusing to know Mrs. Styles, but it is not amusing to be afraid of her, and to know it. Indeed, women have a great power for inspiring

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terror in one ; they are so strange in all the habits of what passes for their minds ; they are angry when you are thinking only of their welfare, and grateful when you meditate their undoing ; logic, even of the text-book kind, is gall and wormwood to them, and they will set off cheerfully to lose a kingdom in order to secure some sentimental guerdon whose value is three-farthings. Men seem to be a different race, a race that scarcely touches woman's interests at any point ; if a man differs from you, he either calls you a fool and gets knocked down, or he hits you without preamble of any kind, and waits till you get up for further logic ; it is all so simple and convincing.

I begin to wonder if Mrs. Styles's regard for all that I don't wish to do—a regard that grows a trifle overwhelming at times—is likely to insure my happiness in the future. When away from her I am exceedingly brave, and this morning I decide that some day, before old age has deepened her frailties beyond bearing, I must part with Mrs. Styles. This is a vain conceit, of course, a protest against her manifest ill-usage ; for I could not well exist without this perplexing, delightful creature, who makes

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Tom Lad's fireside so warm that he prefers the cooler air of the conservatories.

At the top of the lane I meet Cathy, and somehow my fine, free views of women grow foolish on the sudden. She is so sweet, so like a bit of gossamer mist, with the sun and the blue sky lightening it, that she reverses all one's creed. I cannot feel ashamed, moreover, at this bloodless fight with prejudice which Cathy has won—won at her first coming, without a word spoken. Surely it is high time I walked myself into a more wholesome state of mind, and one more masculine.

"I was just coming to see you about the bull-terrier. He's dreadfully ill, Murphy," she explained, breathlessly.

"And I was just starting for a week's walk," I answer, with a grimness I am far from feeling. It would be so easy to turn back with Cathy—so easy to earn her gratitude by ministering to the needs of the bull-terrier—but I have fought with Stylesey, and prevailed, and the obstinacy of battle is on me yet.

Her face grows oddly quiet and colorless, or so it seems to me. Is it true, then, that I have embarked on a mad enterprise whose goal is

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certain and assured disaster? Is Mrs. Styles—is Cathy—possessed of “the sight” which usually sees only disaster and red ruin? A quiet trip in the Dales is hardly excuse for these dramatic warnings.

“I—I am sorry,” she murmurs, after a pause.

And then, with scarcely a good-by, she is moving down the lane, and I fancy, just as she turns her face from me, that there are tears in the brave, gray eyes. Now this is palpably absurd; only a few days ago, when the sunlight lay pink and gold on the westward evening clouds, we had talked together at the bridge—talked of gardening, fishing, and ourselves; but chiefly for some cause or other, of ourselves. She had seemed so gay and winsome, so unlike other women in her sane outlook upon things; yet now she was one with Mrs. Styles in representing what happened to be my blameless whim.

I stand and watch her, and once I nearly follow in search of explanations; but a problem connected with womankind, as I have said, suggests flight to me, at all times, and I do not move. At the bend of the lane she turns and

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waves her hand, and then hastens on as if regretting her own courtesy.

"Heigho!" I sigh, as I go on my way. Though why I sighed I could not have told myself.

At any rate, it is clear that I must contrive to see a quantity of interesting folk during my progress through the Dales ; the child has a true sense of humor, and few things please her more than the odds and ends of character and story which seem to blow as free and careless as the winds between our limestone hills. So it happens that I get out with the thought of Cathy in my mind, and it says a good deal for my brotherly regard for her that throughout my trip I never once lose that recurring thought. "This will be something to tell the Babe when I get home." Bachelor as I am, and hope to be, it seems at times that some companionship is needful, now and then, of a sort that men cannot give ; the more brotherly the relationship, the better, of course, and it lightens my way to remember at odd moments how little chance there is of nonsense between Cathy and myself.

Dear Babe ! Love is as far from her as yet

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as other ills of life are; and if I have my way love shall keep his distance for as long as may be.

I cannot pretend to write a journal of my walking trip. Perhaps I am too lazy; perhaps I am a little too sure that other people have done the thing better; in fact, one of the tragedies of life is the certainty that some one has done everything before, and done it better. And yet my days were full; you cannot saunter, say, starting at nine of the morning, finishing at dusk, and covering in all no more than thirty miles a day; you cannot saunter through a countryside so rich in character and charm as are the Dales without picking up bits of humor, pathos, staunch romance, by the way. They may seem nothing at the moment, these incidents, but when you find your well-earned fireside, and drink the tavern's best by way of a nightcap, and watch the pipe-smoke curl above the settletop, you realize that the day has painted a treasure-house of pictures for you, and has left you richer at the gloaming than it found you with the dawn.

So wind-washed and so clean our Northern valleys are! From the moment of my leaving

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Skipton Castle—old-storied Skipton—I felt no wish except to saunter on. Life up here is enough if it finds you alive and whole of limb, and walking grows, more surely, mile by mile, to be an easy, gliding swing, that is as simple as sitting in a cushioned chair. Men join you on the road. Sometimes a merry farmer pulls up at your side and insists upon your sharing his gig. You may be pressed into a shepherd's service, and have to aid him in turning a wrong-headed flock into the proper road ; you ask for nothing, only to breathe God's wind and see the changing wonder-lights on God's own hills ; and so, expecting little, you find full measure waiting for you of that joy in living, for living's sake, which makes each man's Eden if he has leisure or the wish to enter it.

At Kettlewell, to be sure, one loses for awhile the impulse to go forward, for at Kettlewell—surely the name is music, or does old association warp one's judgment ?—you find such hospitality as compels you, whether you will or no, to loiter for a day or two. The climb to the Stake Pass, however, checks the Sybarite instinct, and afterwards it is such easy going into Bishopdale that your thirty miles a day

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grows longer. Then it seems a pity, now that you are here, not to work northward to the Poet's land that lies about Richmond, Rokeby, and their enchanted purlieus, and after that to saunter down to York and have a peep at the true capital of England; finally, to return by by-ways and wide deviations to this pleasant vale or that, until at last you reach home at least a fortnight later than you thought of doing. It is odd that your first thought on returning to the place you left a few weeks since—left it a little stale, perhaps, a little jaded, a good deal inclined to be introspective—is “How can doctors earn a living?” Your health, your spirits, your sense of having room to stretch yourself, are all aggressive in their joyousness, and Homer's battles are the only reading that can in any way appeal to your palate. It is at these times that you take down your “Iliad” or “Hereward the Wake” from their shelf, and rejoice exceedingly over blood-letting and the stroke of sword. This would seem to be a curious result of pastoral wanderings; yet it is rational, after all, for it means that one is healthy, for the nonce.

These walking trips require experience and

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method, of course, to be enjoyed rightly ; and one finds that in the course of each trip some new detail is learned of that outfit of experience which is necessary to the Complete Wanderer. I happened to be benighted, for instance, during this last journey of mine, and was preparing to sleep peacefully on the open moor rather than hunt blindly for half the night for the path, when I ran against another wayfarer.

"Who's there?" he called, from the darkness.

"The same to you," I answered. "Let's assume we're both honest."

He laughed quietly, and the edge of a round moon, getting out between the clouds, showed me a big fellow, with a wanderer's go-as-you-please air about him, and a wondrous sheet of water dripping from his person, as from my own.

"Lost your way?" he asked, laconically.

"Yes, I'm not strolling out for the frolic of the thing," I said—for, if truth must be told, the effect of too much water on the temper is disastrous.

"Well, neither am I. I was striking for Simmerwater when this storm came on, and

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I've lost the track completely. What are you going to do ?"

"Sleep in the heather. There's not a cattle-shed or anything to be found."

"Ah ! You're young to the game yet, unless you absolutely covet rheumatic fever. Let me make your bed for you."

He went, as if it were the most ordinary proceeding possible, to the limestone fence that stood twenty yards or so behind us ; he pulled down the upper story and made two good-sized piles of them ; he laughed again, the easy laugh of one who has lived brother to winter and rough weather.

"Have you wool next to the skin?" he asked, casually.

"I'm all wool ; jacket and knickers and all," I said, laughter getting the better of my ill-temper.

"Well, then, you'll take no harm. Lie on a heap of stones, my friend, and take a sip at your flask before going to bed, and wear nothing but wool, and you will wake as sound as a bell."

We scarcely talked at all ; indeed, we were both too weary, and I was astonished to find

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how comparatively cozy was this improvised bed, and how, given a tired body, one could fit one's self into the crannies of the stones. In the morning the sun awoke us, and I sat up, to find my companion regarding me with interest.

" Slept well ?" he asked.

" Like a top."

" Well, you can thank me for saving you from what comes of lying in wet heather. Here, lend's a hand, it will never do to leave the farmer to put our beds into place again."

Here again he struck the true note of the Wanderer, who is a being singularly sensitive to the law of " Do to the farmer and the countryman as you would have the farmer do to you."

We strolled down to Simmerwater together, and parted there, as he was going on to Hawes ; but some day, if the gods are kind, I shall meet my comrade-of-a-night again, and listen to more of such Wanderer's tales as he told during that easy stroll from the moor-top down to Simmerwater.

And now I am home again in Arcady ; and I wonder at its sweetness, as one does always after wandering in strange lands. A home, if

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it be radically mean, grows smaller, meaner, to the view after absence ; but Arcady seems bigger, fresher, altogether fuller of quick life, when we return to it.

On my way through the village I find the Wanderer leaning over his garden-gate, a pinch of snuff poised towards high heaven in his right hand. He greets me cheerily, and a sudden temptation comes to me. I talk of a walk upon the morrow ; I make no mention of my recent trip, but suggest, tentatively, that I should like an easy day ; for has not this hardy Wanderer made me tired and sore ashamed not long ago ?

“ An easy day ? ” chuckles the Wanderer.
“ Why, yes, say thirty miles or so ? ”

“ If I can manage to get so far,” I say, with an air of self-distrust.

“ Get so far, sir ? When I was young, we considered thirty miles a trifle—a trip before breakfast to get an appetite, as one may say. Mithridates was a great walker, and so it follows he was a great man.”

Mithridates had a great many unsuspected virtues, if this Wanderer is to be believed, but I am always too lazy to challenge his knowledge

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of classical history, and to-day I have a subtle joy in humoring his Wanderer's vanity.

"I cannot pretend to walk, in your sense of the word, sir, but I will do my best," I say, with that chiseled air of humility which denies the fact that yesterday I covered, with ease, some forty odd miles.

The morrow dawns cool and bright, and, remembering a recent episode, I stuff cheese and bread and a portly flask in my pocket before seeking out the Wanderer. I mean to lunch to-day, and I mean to walk ; and the Wanderer, as he steps out beside me, with his easy insolence of gait, seems not to realize at all that the younger generation intends for once to justify itself.

I make the pace this time—a comfortable four miles an hour—and towards the end of the twentieth mile I note a doubtfulness steal into the Wanderer's face.

"Shall we have lunch ?" I suggest.

"It is against my habits, sir—but—well, if there were a tavern near I would suggest a halt."

I produce my bread and cheese, and set the flask down beside a peat-fed burn ; and I know that the Wanderer is feeling punished, for he

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drinks my whisky, and eats my cheese, as if he did not despise them in his heart. Then we set off again, and the sun dips downward, and more downward, as we near our fortieth mile. The Wanderer is more pensive than I have ever known him, and I begin to be sorry that I have carried a good jest so far.

Five more miles we cover, and my companion hobbles a little, as if a touch of gout had taken him unawares.

"Sir," he says at last, "I have misjudged you. You can walk, sir—you can walk."

We reach a posting-house by and by. I feel about as fresh as when I started, but the Wanderer is by this time a figure so pathetic that my heart is touched.

"It is ten miles home, sir. Shall we stay here and drive the rest of the way back?" I suggest.

A sudden gladness comes into his face; but he checks it. The Wanderer is game to the last.

"No, sir. A trifling walk of this kind—Ah!" he breaks off with an involuntary groan. His feet have gone to pieces, I can see, and each stride hurts him. I feel a brute, although my

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only motive in this walk was to uphold the honor of the younger generation.

I resolve to be really generous.

"Well, the fact is, I am—er—dead tired," I say, with a prayer that the lie may be accounted white. "Suppose for my sake you agree, sir?"

The Wanderer's gladness grows big; it radiates, as it were, from every square inch of his ruddy person.

"Oh, that is another matter, my boy, quite another matter. To be sure, I ought to have remembered that the younger generation—eh?—well, well, you keep a good stride for a youngster."

We dine, we smoke, we share the Wanderer's snuff. And, after all, when the hired dog-cart drops him at his gate, and he gets down with palpable discomfort, he still keeps game.

"You'll be stiff to-morrow, boy," he says, shaking my hand. "One needs to be well seasoned to feel as fresh as I do now."

I watch him hobble across the moonlit garden-path. I am glad he does not know, like Mithridates, when he is beaten. I am glad, too, that I have found my Wanderer's joy in walking once again.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BABE POURS OUT MY TEA

I AWAKE, after my day with the Wanderer, in a lusty, restless mood, that demands some outlet. I remember, moreover, that the Babe will expect me to report myself after my long absence ; and so I have the mare saddled and ride to the Hall to see if Cathy wants a morning canter. She is nailing up a bit of rebellious clematis when I draw rein at the door, and she greets me with a piece of cloth and a nail in one hand, a hammer in the other.

“ Murphy, how wildly brown and strong you look ! ” she cries.

“ Babe, I have walked five hundred miles since I last saw you.”

“ And the bull-terrier is quite well again, Murphy. Haven’t you been anxious about him ? ”

I hadn’t, as a matter of fact ; but I dare not admit as much.

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"Is he—is he quite fit, then?" I asked.

"Quite. He caught a rabbit this morning, and brought it to me with the funniest look of pride you ever saw. 'Nothing wrong with me,' he seemed to be saying."

Jack, the bull-terrier in question, strolls up to us at this moment. Jack is not beautiful—bull-terriers rarely are—but the Babe is fond of him, and so there must be merit in the beast. We greet each other affably, and he sniffs the mare's hoofs in a casual, inquiring way, that threatens disaster to himself.

"I came to ask you if you wanted a ride, Babe," I say, after quieting the mare.

"Murphy, I should love it. Tie up the mare, will you, and run in to talk to Daddy while I put my habit on. I—I haven't seemed to care much for riding, Murphy, since you deserted me."

I am a fairly absurd person, I suppose, for, as I look down into the frank, childish face, and read the friendship in it, my heart leaps—yes, leaps in the stupid fashion to which hearts are addicted in books. How bonnie the lass is!

I am suffering, unexpectedly, from the same aberration which troubled me, weeks ago, on

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the Bridge of Amity. It is a fatherly feeling—a brotherly instinct—to be candid, I don't know what the impulse is. At any rate, I have the Babe's hands close in mine, and I find myself saying that it is good to be at home.

"Yes, but, Murphy"—her glance, a fleeting one, is frightened and confiding, both in one—"you needn't—Murphy—you *needn't* break my fingers!"

"Hallo! Has the prodigal returned?"

The voice is big and jolly, and I see the Squire regarding us from the doorstep. I feel a trifle foolish, though there is no reason in the world why I should not hold the hands—yes, both hands, if I wish—of a Babe who is not yet grown up.

"Yes. I'm home, sir," I answer, in a clumsy voice. "I—I came to see if Cathy would care for a ride."

"Very sensible of you. The child has not been herself lately; a scamper will do her good."

"You will join us, though?"

I know, even as I make the suggestion, that I shall be disappointed if he comes with us; and this, too, is disquieting, for never until

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now have I thought of the Squire as less than a desirable person.

"Not this morning, boy. My agent is coming up to talk over drains, and so on. I wish I could," he adds, with a wistful glance at the joyousness of earth and sky.

He is firm, however, and Cathy and I set off presently, like a couple of children who have stolen a holiday. At least, that is my own feeling, and from the Babe's look of mischief and high spirits, I am sure that she has the same sense of playing truant. Indeed, in looking back on life, it is invariably our stolen joys which stand out, in a rosy glow, against the dull, gray background of our normal days. The first cigarette smoked fearfully, amid the screen of woodland undergrowth; the rabbits snared in one's youthful, unregenerate days; the deeds of darkness, hidden, even in later years, from Stylesey the Vigilant, these trifles are the cream that lies upon the milk of life, and in Arcady we are candid enough to admit as much.

Not that our ride this morning is a stolen one in any sense. The Squire has watched our departure, and waved a friendly hand in token of God-speed; it is all the most usual thing in

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the world, apart from the absence of a groom—and yet we make an escapade of it.

“Murphy, we’ll go ever so far to-day!” cries the Babe, as we mount the first stiff hill. “We’ll not be home for lunch—we’ll not be home for tea—I am not sure we won’t be late for dinner.”

“We’ll be as desperate as we can be, Babe, be sure of that,” I answer, sympathetically.

I feel reassured. I lose the faint disquiet left by the episode at the Hall door. Of course, she is a child—or how could she wear this irresponsible, gay air of mischief? By and by, however, I change my mind again, for Cathy shows me, unintentionally, a new side to her character. We have just turned the corner which gives us a view of Grimhurst Mill and the three thatched cottages that seem to seek shelter beneath its walls.

“Oh, Murphy, I quite forgot,” Cathy says suddenly. “It—it was so pleasant, you know, to see you back again, and other things slipped out of my mind, and I forgot a promise!”

The Babe says flattering things to me in such a simple, matter-of-fact way, that one cannot suspect flattery. Surely this child is as candid

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as the sky above us! Surely we want more babes in an uncandid world.

"What is the promise?" I ask.

"There's a poor crippled body lives in the first cottage there. Her husband was one of father's woodsmen, you know, and he was killed by a falling tree—and—well, don't you see, Murphy, I mayn't seem very old, but there are duties."

Cathy does, indeed, seem rather old at the moment. She is no longer a mischief-seeking child; her face is grave, and womanly, and tender.

"Would you mind very much if I asked you to wait for half-an-hour?" she asks.

"I think, Babe, I could wait a lifetime for you," is my astonishing rejoinder.

Much walking would seem to unchain the natural man; at any rate I find myself saying and doing the most unlikely things this morning. She scarcely hears my words, I think, for her eyes are troubled as they rest on the thatched cottage. I lift her to the ground—what a bit of thistledown she is to lift—and wait patiently for half-an-hour, an hour. At last she comes out, and the tears are in her eyes.

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"Murphy, life seems so—so *abominable* at times," she whispers.

What has passed in the cottage I do not know; I do not ask; but Cathy, as she rides beside me, has a glory all about her, as of the sun that does good work at harvest time.

Little by little, like a sensible Babe, she returns to her old mood; it is plain that, now she has done all that is possible, she does not mean to fret unduly about those sullen tragedies of life which, even in Arcady, make us sometimes doubt the ways of Providence.

The morning is so fine; our horses are so willing; how can we be anything but merry, once we have shut down that door of sadness which is perpetually opening of its own accord?

"Cathy, we'll lunch at the 'Duke of Cavendish,'" I suggest, as the result of a long silence. "We'll have a steak, and blackberry tart to follow—blackberry tart, infant, with the Cavendish cream in lavish bowls."

She glances quietly at me; there is the woman, not the child, in her regard.

"Murphy, you must never try to take me in; you do it badly. I've made you sad, haven't I?"

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I made myself sad—by that visit to the thatched cottage.

“Nonsense, child. Let’s have a gallop ; the mare won’t be held in much longer.”

The gallop blows half our cobwebs away, and then we find ourselves at the door of the “Duke of Cavendish.” It would be very easy to give you the true name of the tavern, and just as easy to describe its situation ; but that would be treason to the select company of Wanderers who know its virtues, and who wish to keep it unspotted from the outside world. Enough that the tavern’s steaks are mystic, wonderful ; its tarts and pies and cream a rare example of true poetry ; enough that the Babe and I lunch regally, and afterwards stroll up and down the old-world tavern garden for a long hour before remounting.

For our horses’ sakes, and for our own, we do no more than saunter along to the next tavern, whose speciality—that of dainty teas—appeals more to the Babe than to myself.

“*Shall we be late for dinner, Murphy ?*” she inquires, as she pours out my tea.

Her roguery has all returned, she adopts a little air of consequence—almost a matronly air—as

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she makes the tea to my liking. A daft thought comes to me that it would be extremely pleasant to have some one, as nearly like the Babe as possible, to preside over my breakfast-tray at home.

"Well, I don't know, Babe. We have been late fairly often, haven't we? Suppose we surprise the Squire for once, and arrive as the gong is sounding?"

A sudden gust of wind against the glass surprises us. We have been talking too pleasantly to notice the look of things outside, and Cathy gives a little cry as she sees how quickly the day has turned to rain. The sky is like molten copper, the sun is disappearing in an angry flame; all the leaves are blowing upward, and they tremble as if they felt a human dread of thunder and wild weather.

It is magnificent as a spectacle. The lightning blazes continually, the thunder cracks and moans and growls among the hills; the rain comes down in sheets, and hisses along the ground.

"It cannot last, Babe, that is certain," I say, as I stand at the window and watch the storm rave itself to pieces.

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The storm does last, however ; as soon as the wind has swept down the valley, and all seems ready for the calm to follow, the direction of the tempest is changed as completely as if the rocky hills had driven it back to seek shelter whence it came. Up and down, down and up the valley sweep the sheets of rain ; and when the worst of the tempest has passed, a thick persistent rainfall follows.

I go to the door at last, only to find that the brooks are rivers, the high-road a watercourse. The afternoon is slipping on towards evening. There seems no hope that the sullen skies will ever lift. What are we to do ?

Cathy, when I return, laughs like an infant. "This is really an adventure, Murphy !" she cries. "Do you think they'll have to fetch us away in boats ?"

But I am not looking at that side of the matter. It is being brought home to me that Cathy may, after all, appear to the world to be something more than just the child she is. If we are benighted here—and it seems extremely likely—we shall have to look at matters with the dead-fish eye of the chaperone ; at least, I shall have to regard her from that point of

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view, for Cathy never will really contract what the Squire calls "Matron's jaundice," if she lives to an extreme old age.

The hours slip by, and still the rain is dripping down to the dripping earth. I order dinner at last, and Cathy is still as merry as a lark when we sit down.

"Murphy, please don't look so solemn," she entreats. "This will be something to tell Dad when we get back. You—you are not tired of it all?" she adds, with a wistful air that puzzles me.

"Tired? Of course I'm not, Babe. But you'll have to spend the night here, you know."

I ring for the landlady—one of those shrewd and homely hostesses who are dying out amongst us—and she stands curtseying on the threshold. I am reassured by the very sight of her. She might be Stylesey, so safe and comfortable she looks.

"This lady will stay here to-night. Can I leave her in your charge, and ride over for her in the morning?" I say.

"To be sure, sir. It's not fit for a dog to be out-of-doors to-night."

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Cathy is regarding me with wide-open eyes; but she says nothing until I have made all arrangements, and have ordered my mare to be brought round in an hour's time.

"Murphy, do you propose to swim home through the roads?" asks the Babe, quietly, as soon as we are alone.

"I—I must. The Squire, you see, will be anxious——"

"Then, is it kind, do you think, to leave me here alone? Murphy, haven't you always taught me to 'play the game,' as you call it? And is it quite the game for one comrade to let another go out into the rain and mud——?"

"Babe, there's no other way."

"I don't agree with you a bit, Murphy. I shall come, too."

For the first time in my life I find myself at war with Cathy. "See here, you've *got* to stay," I put in, with an abruptness that brings a startled look to her face.

She says no more, and when, at last, I am ready to set off into the solid rain-sheets, she says good-night to me quite humbly. My heart is stupidly soft towards her; she looks so little and so frail to be left in this out-of-the-

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way tavern ; the thing assumes the atmosphere of tragedy ; yet what else can I do ?

"Cheer up, little girl," I whisper. "You'll find me here again to-morrow, and we'll have a brisk ride home."

"I am quite cheerful, Murphy, thank you," she answers, still with that quiet, humble air.

I set off at last, and in five minutes I am wet to the skin ; so wet, that further water seems to be a matter of no concern at all, except where the hollows of the road are pools up to the mare's knees. My thoughts are with the Babe, I confess. She will have such a lonely evening of it !

Just as we reached Ditcombe Wood, the mare and I, a sound of splashing comes from behind—a quick, impetuous splashing such as only a galloping horse could make. In a moment the Babe rushes up, and I can see in the half-light (for the clouds have opened out a little, and there's a moon somewhere behind them) that she is full of glee.

"I thought I'd catch you soon," she cries, reining up beside me, as if this were the most usual encounter in the world.

"Babe ! What are you doing ? "

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"Playing the game, Murphy, as you taught me to," she answers, demurely. "Did you really think I meant to let you ride alone?"

"But—but you seemed to have given in, Babe, you—"

"Ah, yes, because I saw a certain look in your face, and I knew it was no use to argue. So I just slipped out to the ostler while you were looking at the weather, and told him to saddle both horses; and then, after you had gone, I put on my hat, and told the landlady I had changed my mind, and—well, she couldn't apply physical force, you know, and so here I am. It's rather jolly to be wet once in a way —don't you think so, Murphy?"

I answer nothing. I am full of wonder that the way of a maid with a man should be so elusive; it is fitting that she should decline to obey me in any matter, even where her safety is in case; but I am puzzled by the ease with which she has won our little battle. Then suddenly I laugh, and the Babe laughs, too, and I confess, in a moment of confidence, that it is very good to have her with me.

"Now you are sensible again, Murphy," she tells me, suavely. "Do you know, you are

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far, far heavier than Daddy is, once you begin to be heavy. I wouldn't, Murphy, especially when it is so jolly to get wet."

In spite of the watercourses we have to cross, in spite of the mud and saddles soaked to the consistency of blotting-paper, we contrive to enjoy our ride amazingly. As if in recognition of our humor, the rain holds off at last, the clouds lie open to the moon, and all the wet, wide valley smiles magically amid its tears.

The Squire is at the door when at last we reach the Hall; we can hear the big clock in the hall strike eleven.

"Is that you, Cathy?" he calls, anxiously.

"Yes, Daddy; so wet and so jolly, that Murphy tells me I am a sprite. It's rather fun to be a sprite."

"You ought to have known better, boy," growls the Squire. "How could you let the child ride home all through the rain?"

Before I can answer, Cathy puts in her word; her voice is full of laughter.

"He forbade me, Dad, and he looked so stern! So I waited until he had ridden off to tell you where I was, and then I rode after him. And here we are; and Murphy will have to

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scamper home and change, because he is so fragile."

The Squire does just what I did awhile since. He laughs.

"Oh, well, you'll neither of you take any harm," he says. "You'll have to forgive my snappishness, boy ! I was anxious, and—well, I know what it is to say 'no' when her ladyship means 'yes.'"

I am tired and a good deal sore by the time the mare is stabled and after I have changed. Yet I am oddly happy, and the one thing that makes me happy is the picture, clear and well defined, of Cathy pouring out my tea. Tea is so different a matter when—heigho ! It's time I went to bed.

CHAPTER XV

A LITTLE AFFAIR OF BROAD BEANS

A WEEK or so after the storm which gave me a new insight into the Babe's character, Tom Lad and I found ourselves very busy, for the anniversary of our local Show of garden and dairy produce was upon us. I should state that we are a little proud of this carnival of ours, which is known within a radius of twenty miles, and which attracts to our quiet village as jolly and mirth-seeking a company as you will find in all the Dales. Farmers bring their wives and daughters, laborers come in, seated on strange carts and traps that seem coeval with the Flood ; allotment gardeners, whether they grow fruit or flowers or vegetables, join the company ; dairy maids and dairy mistresses show skins of milk and—roses in our midst ; good-tempered Squires and Squires' sons mix

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with the jolly throng ; our festival is an epoch in the Dales.

To be sure, the prizes are of extravagant value, and the expenses rather foolishly in excess of the receipts ; but one regards this as an item of the year's expenditure, as necessary as Tom Lad's wages or the up-keep of a horse, and perhaps, of all the money that I spend, I grudge this the least ; so certain is it that it goes to a good cause. The tradition of the show is, in a word, good temper, and feuds must be deep-rooted if they do not yield, for this one day, at least, to amity.

After the judging is finished, sports follow, and so we are led on to nightfall and the dance upon the green by steps of constantly-increasing gaiety. For we choose, be it marked, the time of full moon as nearly as may be, for this Saturday's whole-holiday of ours, and the dancers take a frolic dignity, as of Titania's band, when the sun has wearied, and the gloaming falls like sleep on tired lids, and the great round moon looks down in kindly fashion on the scampering lads and lassies. We have our own musicians, too, of the old village type, and fiddle and viol and irresponsible flute

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sound bravely down between our guardian hills.

This year the show is marked by a diverting incident, of which Timothy Brailes, the cobbler, is the unwilling hero. Timothy, I fancy, would fain have the tale go unrecorded, but I must set it down, if only to show how little is needed to tickle our unfailing flow of spirits here in Arcady. As one of the judges of garden produce, I could neither show vegetables myself, nor let Tom Lad show for me; and so it occurred to the astute Timothy that he might garner in my vineyard with profit to himself.

Now, as it happened, I had tried an experiment with broad beans this year; they had seemed to flourish so well in times past with greater and still greater allowance of manure, that this year I decided to double my usual allowance of compost. The crop had come up strong and clean; the pods had grown to an egregious size; I had rejoiced and been glad, until, a morning or two before the show, Tom Lad broke off a pod and opened it. Within were a few beans the size of a shriveled pea; the manure had wasted itself on stalk and pod,

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and Tom Lad smiled like a god who had foreseen all this.

It was these beans that attracted the eyes of Timothy Brailes, who dropped in—as it were, with no motive whatever—while I was having an early breakfast on this morning of the show. He did not seek me, but encountered Tom on the lawn, and suggested a saunter through the kitchen garden. Tom knew the motive of the errand well enough, as might have been guessed from his babe-like innocence of mien; but the cobbler thought himself a diplomat.

“You’ve got a nice lot of beans here, Tom,” said he, carelessly, halting opposite my well-manured crop.

“Oh, ay, they’ll do.”

“Would a two or three be missed, think ye?”

“No, I can’t say they would.”

“Well, I’ve a nice tray o’ vegetables—a grand tray—but my beans have gone all Silly-Simon way this year, and they’ll spoil the lot.”

“That’s a pity,” said Tom, guardedly.

“It would be a pity soon mended if I could borrow a handful or so of yonder lot. I never saw finer in my life, never.”

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"Well, I've naught to do with it. They're the master's beans—but I'm fearful throng this morning, and if you like to take a few while my back's turned, it'll be for you and your conscience to settle, Timothy."

"Oh, dang conscience!" cried Timothy, in high glee. "It's a full tray I want for the flower show."

I knew nothing of this transaction at the time, and my surprise was great when, in the course of judging, I came across some bean-pods that were as large as my own ill-fated crop. I opened one, and found the same phenomenon of microscopic beans in gigantic sheaths, and Timothy's tray of vegetables was doomed,

Tom Lad smiled when I met him soon after lunch, and mentioned the incident to him.

"Ay, they *were* as like as could be to your lot, sir," he said, looking up from a pen of sheep which he had been examining with a critical eye. "Timothy Brailes was here a bit after cock-crow, you see, and I always did set my face against showing borrowed stuff, so when he like as he reckoned to want a few broad beans, I encouraged him, you understand. Begow, his

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face was a picture when you ripped th' pod open and showed him what he'd got by borrowing!"

As I have said, small things amuse us here in Arcady, and the cobbler has lost his rightful surname once for all; he is known among us now as Timothy Beanpod.

The borrowing of other men's produce is, by the way, a fruitful—indeed, almost the only—cause of friction; it is hard sometimes to detect it, but by dint of occasional exposure and frequent stimulating of public opinion on the subject, we are as moral a company of exhibitors as you will find within the boundaries of flower-land.

Another item of interest there was to-day, as I learned when, about noon, Cathy came up to me excitedly.

"I've done it at last, Murphy!" she cried.

"What have you done, Babe?"

"Beaten Stylesey with a tray of lovely eggs! The first time, Murphy! I've always had to be content with second prize before."

"Infant, it is rather terrible! I'm glad, at any rate, that Mrs. Styles knows I'm not a judge in that department. I wonder, child, if

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the judges looked at your face instead of at the eggs?"

It was an absurd question, and I did not know, until too late, that the thought had slipped away from my control; but the lassie was so full of life and irresponsibility and sheer comeliness that I could have well understood a judge's aberration.

"Murphy, how could they know they were mine?" Cathy protested, in high indignation. "I've tried so hard to beat Stylesey, and now you will do nothing but talk nonsense about it."

"Come and see the heifers, Cathy—I've taken a first, too, with one—and you shall laugh at me in turn."

On the way we meet Mrs. Styles; she has come from the direction of the poultry tent, and she greets Cathy with respectful aloofness.

"I couldn't help it, I really couldn't, Stylesey," the Babe murmurs, with a laugh as soft as it is propitiating.

"Of course not, Miss Cathy. Eggs is eggs, as my husband is fond of reminding me, and judges is judges; but there's eggs and eggs,

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Miss, in a way of speaking, and there's judges and judges."

Delphic to the last, in joy or in adversity, Mrs. Styles makes her obeisance and goes her way. I have a hazy notion, from the look in her apple-pink face, that she is in search of Tom Lad ; she finds him comforting at times, if only as a whetstone to the tongue.

CHAPTER XVI

THE APPLE-STEALERS

THE apples are ripening in the orchard now, and the September sun shines down through golden mist upon the yellow Keswicks and the heartsome Pippins. A quiet season, and a sweet, this autumn-time, when Nature's toil is done for a little while and her recompense lies in her open lap; there is no fret, no eagerness toward endeavor, as in the spring; our Mother sits with folded hands, conning the tally of her crops, and the still, small voice (which praises only those who truly labor) is telling her "Well done."

With the apples, however, come the village boys. They do not consider the poetry of fruition, but rather the prose of toothsome edibles. It is a case of the blackbirds over again, for I am fond of these boys, with cheeks as ruddy as the fruit they steal, with their

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abundant zest in life and sense that the wide world was made for them. Yet, as the crop grows less and less, just when it is time to ingather, I feel the same elemental man stirring in me as when the blackbirds begin their onslaught on my peas. At first, I argue weakly that there is fruit enough for all, that the lads are welcome to an apple now and then ; next I realize that the thieves come not by single spies, but in battalions ; finally, I grow truculent.

Tom Lad and I arrange it all between us. We get up with the dawn, and Tom creeps to his station at the far end of the orchard, while I wait under shadow of the chestnut tree that stands between lawn and orchard. The boys, elated by past triumphs, and disposed—I suspect—to overrate my leniency, will be sure to come by one or other of these ways before the sun has climbed much further ; and, as I wait, I cherish my new-found fierceness, and number to myself the awful penalties I will exact.

It has a charm of its own, a dim excitement akin to that of stalking deer, this waiting in the dawn to hold the apple-garth against the spoiler. One has leisure, too, to turn a new

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page in the life of birds, of field-mice, even of the insects; and over the sweep of guardian moorland up above yonder there ebbs and flows so wonderful a play of light—saffron and shell-pink, purple and red and deepest yellow—as in itself must color one's whole day. Oh, indeed, the village boy has his uses, after all; but for him I might be wasting all this glory of the dawn, and sleep can steal from one more precious things than Ribstones and than Keswicks.

The sun mounts fast, weaving the dawn mists into fairy wearing-gear. I am lost, if truth be told, in wonder at the gifts God gives to man, when there comes a shout from the orchard.

"Now, lads, have I caught you now, or haven't I?" comes Tom Lad's hearty voice.

In a moment I become a fighter, not a theorist. The stern song of battle warns me, as I see five urchins scampering madly in between the mossy boles; they are the answer to Tom Lad's question, for it is plain that, so far, they have outraced him. Nearer they come to my friendly chestnut, and Tom is not ten yards behind them in the chase. I run to meet them,

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snap one with either hand—with the joy of one who kills with the right and the left barrel—and hold them tight together. The boy, I regret to say—the boy who is so suddenly put on his defense—is an animal who kicks; but I find that, if you have two of them in a firm grasp, you can do a good deal by allowing them to kick one another, under the impression that you are the victim of their attack.

This morning, after a series of plunges, kicks, and wrigglings, my captives sober down. They are aware that their faces, their parents, and their abodes are as well known to me as the apple trees which are the cause of all this war; they see—at least, I try to make them see—an air of the Relentless Judge about me; they begin to explain that they have done nothing, and will never do it again, and, please, it is time they were home in time for breakfast, or mother will be getting uneasy.

“Mother doesn’t breakfast for an hour yet; we have lots of time for talk,” I say, in a cold and hollow voice, that is rather like the stage version of the ghost in “Hamlet.”

Tom Lad has come up by this time, and I seat myself under the chestnut tree, the truants

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standing wofully in front of me, with Tom Lad on one side as a guard. I feel like the Elder of the village, conducting a Witenagemot ; I feel also a strong desire to laugh, which I suppress.

“Now, lads, what have you to say?” I ask. It is a good plan to begin any magisterial inquiry with a question ; for the law, so far as I have known it, delights to put its victims into difficulties at the outset.

They have nothing to say, as I expected ; so I turn solemnly to Tom Lad, whose face is sober beyond expression.

“Tom,” I begin, “there are too many rascals in the village. We must make an example of these lads.”

“Yes, sir!” Tom answers, with the utmost cheerfulness. “Thrash 'em well to begin with, and after that——”

He stops, and I wait until the vague terrors following the “after that” have had time to suggest themselves to the bucolic mind.

“The thrashing shall be left to their fathers,” I say at last ; “that will keep—but you might go for the constable, Tom.”

The culprits fall a-weeping at this stage, and

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I feel a ridiculous desire to give them a shilling apiece and to tell them to make off and be better boys in the future. But that would be to make a fool of one's self, in their eyes and in Tom Lad's, and I recall, by way of strengthening my will, the rifled crops.

"He'll scarcely be astir yet, sir," Tom puts in, with the same dreadful gravity, "but I'll go round the first thing after breakfast, and he'll know where to find them."

"Very well," I say, rising from my seat of justice, after a little impromptu sermon on the sure results of wrongdoing and the enormity of theft. "Very well, they shall go home now, and the constable shall fetch them later. You had better tell your fathers, lads, for they'll know sooner or later."

The boys depart in panic, and I am sorry, uncomfortably sorry; it is only Tom Lad's presence that restrains me from following and explaining that the whole thing is a comedy.

The next scene in the play comes an hour later, when the respective fathers—Timothy Brailes is one, the village blacksmith the other—arrive in haste, and are shown into the kitchen by Mrs. Styles.

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"If you please, sir," begins Timothy, with a hitch of his lame leg, "it's a bad business, this."

"A very bad business," I assent.

"You see, sir, lads is lads, sir, and you can't make 'em different. And Bill here and me, we said you had a kindish heart, like, sir, an wouldn't bring respectable names into the police-court."

"I'm tired of carrying a kind heart, Timothy ; it lessens my apple crop."

"Look here, sir," the blacksmith bursts in, "the lads is sorry, and I would just like you to get a longish strap, and have 'em down here, and lather 'em till they couldn't sit down for a twelvemonth. That would please all sides, sir —except the lads, maybe—and nothing more need be said."

I went to the window, and professed to give the matter my earnest thought ; at last I turned.

"Very well ; I will not prosecute this time," I said. "Send them down at six this evening, and meanwhile I'll hunt up a strap."

"Thank you kindly, sir. A hiding never did harm to a lad or a woman in this world—it like as it keeps 'em in their place—and, when th'

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lads come, remember they've got skins as thick as walnut bark."

I promised to bear this in mind, and my visitors departed. As the day wore on, I discovered symptoms of that weakness of purpose which always attacks me when anybody is to be punished. I remember with what chastened glee I had gone, now and again, with poaching friends of my acquaintance, and had considered theft in the light of sport. Yet now I proposed to stand up in quiet blood and administer two thrashings for a similar misdirection of sporting energy. As six o'clock drew near, the thing grew more impossible and I reasoned that the suspense alone would have proved sufficient punishment for the offspring of Timothy Brailes and of the blacksmith. There is no need perhaps, to chronicle the sequel; the lads came in fear, and listened to a second homily, and departed each with a shilling, given in defiance of all logic. I begin to doubt my strength of will, and Tom Lad, to make bad worse, asked me point-blank that same evening if I had administered the thrashing.

"I knew you wouldn't, sir," he says, sadly, when I am silent. "It's the same wi' the birds

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an' the same wi' the lads, and how we ever live
at all is past my reckoning."

Yet I have enjoyed a wondrous dawn, and
there is joy in the hearts of two lads who will
assuredly come back next year to plunder my
Ribstones and my Keswicks. Well let them!
For it is live and let live in Arcadian orchards.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAYS WEAR WINTERWARD

IT is an odd thing but, as the days grow shorter, I find myself scribbling fewer and fewer notes under the lime trees. Certainly there is less interest in life ; it seems as if one's chapters—fanciful divisions of my own, made to give myself a kind of breathing space now and then—themselves grow shorter in obedience to the same law that governs the path of the sun. One cause, perhaps, is the need to be doing this and that about the garden in the brief working hours at one's disposal ; but the prime influence, undoubtedly, is the season's. For it would seem that the longer a man lives out of doors, the more surely does he yield himself to the suggestions of seasons and of weather ; he laughs when the sun shines, he is vaguely sorrowful with the mist ; he yearns to be twice as busy as is possible in spring, and in

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autumn he must look with something of the Mother's lethargy upon the need for action.

So I am here, under the limes, with a tranquil disbelief in pencil and in paper. The lawn is a carpet of wet autumn leafage, and I have constantly to brush away the dropping leaves as I am writing, as if the leaves themselves were minded to protest against my casual efforts—to come, as it were, between the paper and the pencil.

It is mid-October now, and winter looks tentatively at us from between the half-naked trees. Yet the joy of life is lessened not a whit. Why will people assume that, when spring has come and gone, when autumn has long since shaken farewell hands with summer, there is nothing to be done but wait for another spring? This mid-October period in itself is beautiful beyond belief, up here in these northern lands, where there are hills and moors to give a meaning to the landscape. The trees are robbed of half their leaves, and the tracery of their branches shows out the clearer against the happy, amber sunlight, the sun himself is luminous, and soft, and unaggressive, as he never is in the full tide of summer.

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How to describe a sweep of moor, sloping swift toward the sun, at noon on an October day? It is a hopeless effort, though just such a sweep of moor invites me, as I sit here, to set down its glories. The bracken-gold, the bracken-brown, the bracken-saffron; these intermingle with the countless tints of ling, of crowberry, of the bilberry that dies—a gamester to the last—in bravery of crimson, green, and yellow. The pines grow dark, the larches show a gauzy leafage that any breeze is free to scatter, the shriveled oak-leaves whisper as they fall. Oh, be sure that October is no dreary time of year! Be sure, indeed, that there is no dreary time of year at all. Is there not a good deal of superstition connected with our outlook on the seasons? November, most reviled of months, I have found not seldom a season of clear, crisp days, with dry paths underfoot, and skies so exquisite as to seem the gauze-like stuff of which dreams and all high poetry are made. February, again, who comes to us under the false name of Fill-Dyke, is more often than not the driest month of the year, with countless treasure-corners ready for us, filled with promise of the spring, green here and there with leafage moving

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ever-bravely forward. How often has one found March a warmer and a sweeter month than June? Only this year, to go no further back for instances, the Ides of March—troublous enough to Cæsar, but not to Arcady—dawned warm and peaceful as high summer; the sun had heart in him, and opened every crocus-bud upon the lawn; at four of the afternoon I astonished Stylesey by demanding tea and muffins out of doors, and enjoyed the same without even a hint of cold.

The fact is, we do not try to form a true judgment of the seasons; tradition bids us look for gaiety in summer and gloom in winter; yet, if we live wind-free, and look about us, we often find the case reversed. What if, on this Autumn day, the lilacs and the laburnum bloom have gone the way of buttercups and daisies and red peonies? What if the meadow grass was long since scythed, and all the apples gathered from the orchard? The moors are red-ripe still above us; the wind is frolicsome and soft; we can take example from the Michaelmas daisies in the corner yonder, which show bright eyes to coming winter, as who should say, "Who cares for Boreas?"

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One special interest this season has, for about this time—since there is less to be done in field and garden—we drift into that peculiar Arcadian joy known to Tom Lad as a “bit of bodging.” The phrase covers a variety of work, such as the making of a fowlhouse, a pigeoncote, a pond for ducks and geese; and if you wish to be what one may call the “Complete Bodger,” you must be a good stonemason, carpenter, painter, with a casual talent for glazing, and a knowledge of the curious habits of wire-netting. Even the making of a wheelbarrow on one’s premises may legitimately come under the head of “a bit of bodging”; but this, I may mention incidentally, is an experiment attempted once, and once only, for reasons which nothing but experience can render clear.

Tom Lad, of course, was born with all the known tools of the world in his hands, and I can only follow humbly in his wake when “bodging” has to be done. Still, I find that one picks up the knack of it in time, for it has a rare power, this bodging, of compelling you to give your whole mind to the labor. You cannot possibly both bodge and mope at one and the same time.

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To-day, as I was in the midst of praising autumn—indeed, I had just written the Michaelmas Daisy's Challenge, “Who cares for Boreas,” and was getting well forward with the extension of this and other conceits—as I was playing very happily, in fact, with thoughts, and quips, and gossip of the seasons, Tom Lad carried me off to help him, according to promise, with the making of a wooden fence. We had great joy in it, yet afterwards, when afternoon was wearing toward dusk, I found myself again upon the garden seat, glad to be idling once more in company with Nature.

As I watch the twilight purpling on the moor-slope opposite, as I see the steady fall of gold and crimson leaves which is the snow of autumntide, I cannot but breathe a thanksgiving to Our Lady of the Shortening Days; and, while my brier murmurs quietly to itself, the world seems very good. If more is wanted for contentment, is there not the sleepy crooning of the birds, the lowing of untroubled kine, the faint, far bustle of the farm lads nearing home?

I wonder suddenly, with a sense of sheer surprise, what London is looking like to-night.

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I might so easily be there! I might be hurrying to change, in preparation for further hurrying through dinner, and after-haste to reach the theater; I might be moving through the dust and uproar of the streets; I might even—for such things have been known of me, and will be again, I fear—I might even be nerving myself to plunge into some good lady's crush—a dance, at the worst, may be, such as idle ladies love and idle men abhor.

I might be doing all these things! But I am not; I am in Arcady instead, and, as if to prove it, a slender figure comes across the lawn, gowned in some russet stuff that seems one in color with the more sober of the falling leaves.

The Babe, so I guess, has been to see Mrs. Styles upon some weighty business connected with her poultry, and she is taking the short cut across the Bridge of Amity—that same short cut which once on a day had led to a pretty bit of pure romance.

She did not see me as I sat there in the shadows, and I watched her for awhile—watched her move with that unstudied, lissom gait of hers which in itself is poetry.

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"Cathy!" I called at last, just as she was being swallowed by the gloaming.

She waits till I join her, and there is a curious excitement in her face.

"Have you realized it yet?" she says.

"Have I realized what, Babe?"

"Why, that winter is nearly here. Oh, Murphy, think how soon we shall be hunting Ditcombe Vale."

In a moment autumn recedes; I am eager, all afresh, for the winter-time that will strip the country bare.

"Come and tell Rupert all about it," I suggest.

We go down together to the stables, and Rupert turns his sleek head to greet us.

"Rupert, Rupert, you are going to hear the hounds again," whispers Cathy, as she strokes his muzzle.

And Rupert laughs gently to himself, though he is too well-bred to tell the lassie that he knows it as well as she; instead, he pretends that it is news to him, and then begs casually for sugar.

Life, surely, is vastly worth the living. The Babe and I will hunt together soon!

CHAPTER XVIII

'TIS A FINE HUNTING DAY

THE joy of it! To awake with the sun, and to thrust one's head out of the window, and to know that the first hunting-morn of the season is breaking clear and balmy, to see the wintry heaps of leaves shine, gemmed with hoar frost—to feel the glory of one's strength, and to remember that you and he will race together, as of old, behind the red-brown brush of Sir Reynard the Slim-Footed. You and he! You and your sleek roan horse, with none but he and you and Reynard in the world. To scent the crisp, rare breeze, to let fancy take you over this or that big fence which will meet you later in the day—to hear, in brief, the hunting fathers sound their horns and yell their "Tally-Ho" from far-off generations—this is to live and to be great.

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Winter is coming fast. What of that? Spring is naught, and summer is naught; the reign of King Fox has come, and all the year seems to have been the prelude only to this hunting-time.

I dress this morning with an odd, happy sense that I am some one else; my limbs are lighter; my bath is more invigorating; my heart is singing far more merrily than it is wont to do. Yet, even as I reach the stair-foot, and attempt to cross to the breakfast-room, I receive the first check of the season; for Mrs. Styles is waiting for me.

Mrs. Styles does not approve of my hunting.

Indeed, her philosophy of life is to disapprove, *a priori*, of anything done by one's own sex. Man, in her view, is an animal created solely for the purpose of doing wicked, foolish, and exasperating deeds. If he happens to be virtuous and upright, she regards him as a "milksop, sir, not fit to herd with *real* men." If, on the other hand, he is a "real" man, she denounces him as a wastrel, a deceiver of poor women, a selfish brute who only thinks of his own pleasure. I often think that Mrs. Styles, despite her fresh look of health and her homely

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features, possesses one of the subtlest brains I ever came across ; there's no word or action—if it be a man's—but she can turn to scorn, and it is a pleasant exercise of mine to picture her—as the judge, of course—confronted with King Arthur and with Lancelot. To Lancelot she would say, in her slow, convincing tone, “Mercy me, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, I should think, but, then, men-folk and shame were never sweethearts, as we say in Yorkshire. Begging your pardon, Mr. Lancelot, and speaking as a plain mother with children of her own to bring up decent-like, I should call you no better than a common thief. What had you to do with Ginever; though she was bonnie and all, and as light-of-eye as you could meet ? Ginever, wasn't yours, sir, and, in a manner of speaking, you're no better than a man who robs his neighbor's hen-roost.”

All this would be interlarded with the respectful touches which make Mrs. Styles's oratory perfect ; while she condemns, she would have you to understand that she knows her position, and respects the outward form of her victim, if not his inward grace.

Then King Arthur would come up for judg-

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ment, and she would not eye him half so kindly as she did Lancelot the Reckless.

"Well, sir—I should say 'your majesty,' though majesty is as majesty does, and a Minorca hen shouldn't go laying bantam eggs —well, I've a pretty poor opinion of you, if you'll excuse a plain body's freedom. How could you look to keep a bonnie, gay wife, when you were always mooning and moitering with your fly-by-sky notions? Oh, ay, you'd got a sword Excalibur, and you were fearful fond of thinking big thoughts and talking with the stars; but I've lived, maid and wife and mother, a good few years longer than you, young man, and I've learned this much—lasses, specially wives, don't look for Excaliburs (there's a heathenish word for you, Popish likely, or French, or both), and they don't look for moonshine; what they want is a man who can nigh on break 'em in two when he gets to be fond-like."

And Arthur blushes, just as Lancelot had paled. Mrs. Styles has struck home to the weak joints in either's harness, and she dismisses them with a nod. It is not of the least consequence to her that both are present when she

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shifts her point of view so suddenly. She is clever enough to know that each will feel his own smart to the exclusion of all else. My good friend, the housekeeper, would have made an excellent King's counsel.

As regards my fondness for hunting, she is peculiarly active in criticism, for some reason or other. So far as I can recollect, there has been no hunting morn which has not found Mrs. Styles waiting to convince me of coming disaster.

"Good morning, sir. You're dressed for hunting, I see." This is her usual beginning. "Well, that means chasing a fox, I take it, that never did you or yours any harm. But there! That's of a piece with life as I've seen it—and I've seen a deal more than I relish. It's fine to go hunting, but we never stop to ask—leastways, men don't—what the fox (or the lass, it's all the same) is thinking of all the time. The fox enjoys it, and the lass enjoys it, say you—and away you go, sir, if you'll allow me the freedom, like a bee that's seeking fresh honey."

"Yes, but what has all this to do with buttered toast?" I break in. "I am late for the meet as it is, and shall have to pick them

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up somewhere between here and Flittermole Dyke."

"Buttered toast, sir—speaking plainly—is good in its place, but I'm thinking of your bones."

I shiver instinctively. "Not so bad as that surely. My bones—well, you know, Mrs. Styles, there's flesh on them yet."

"Your bones, sir," she proceeds, blocking my way along the passage with that exasperating stolidity I know so well. "I knew your mother before you, sir, and we were proud, sir, both of us, of the good little bones you brought into the world. Poor lamb!—meaning your mother—what would she say if she could see you trusting life and limb to a mare that's as fly-by-sky as yourself?"

"And the toast, Mrs. Styles? The buttered toast?"

"Small use of toast, sir, if you're to lie dead in a ditch-bottom before dusk o' night. I'm sure I go heavy as lead all day when you're hunting, for I haven't the skill in handling corpses, sir, that my grandmother had. She was what they call a 'layer-out,' very respectable and highly thought of, and many's the

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time I wish she were living, if only to give you the last attentions, sir, a gentleman need ever ask for at such times."

Oh, surely, I shall be compelled to give my dear Cassandra notice!

"Mrs. Styles," I put in, with weary grimness, "I have no notion of breaking my neck—but, if it has to be, I had rather die that way than break my heart."

"By giving up hunting, sir?"

"Exactly."

"Well, there's one that will break your heart fast enough, so it's not for me to complain."

With this cryptic utterance she flounces away to the kitchen and I sit down in expectation of a breakfast more carefully prepared than usual. Mrs. Styles has had the last word; and it is strangely pleasing to one, now and then, to let a woman enjoy a perquisite of this kind—one grants the last word to them, not for lack of repartee, but in the humane spirit that dictates the gift of a doll to a child, or a bag of nuts to a squirrel.

The breakfast, as I anticipated, proves clearly that Mrs. Styles's heart is in the right place,

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wherever her tongue may be. It is a triumph in its way, and, save for the coffee-pot, might just as well be a substantial lunch or a rather heavy dinner. I like to dwell upon the memory of these hunting breakfasts ; one can dare so much, knowing that there is time for an easy ride to the meet, and afterwards a full day's exercise such as would make light of curried cannon balls.

First, a little matter of sardines and toast, a mere flirtation ; then, kidneys and bacon, a more serious affair ; then the *grande passion* of beefsteak pie, an affair of desperate seriousness ; two poached eggs, I think, as a sort of dainty trimming to the whole ; lastly, a touch of marmalade and toast.

"I wonder if the roan is as well-fed as I am," I murmur, as I push the last plate away. "If so, we shall see fun to-day."

Just as I have finished, Mrs. Styles comes in. This is one of Stylesey's good points—she can time your eating-period to a nicety.

"I thought you were late already for the meet, sir," she begins, tentatively.

"Did I say so, Stylesey ?"

"I think so, sir."

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"Well, then, it was a figure of speech," I assert with courage. It is easy to be courageous after such a breakfast. "I meant that I should be late, you see, if I stood gossiping with you much longer."

"Gossiping, sir? And all the while I was talking to you for your own good."

"You have talked much better since; that breakfast, Stylesey, speaks for you."

"I'm glad you liked it, sir. Maybe it will be your last and I should like to think that you relished your last meal. It seems queer, sir, still, and I can't get over it, to think of your poor mother."

"Will you tell Tom to bring Rupert round?" I put in, hurriedly. "I shall be late in earnest if he's not saddled soon."

"Very well, sir, though it goes against my conscience; it looks, as you might say, like ordering your coffin."

"Stylesey, if you have a fault, it is that of being previous; tell Tom to look after the horse, and my coffin can look after itself."

Mrs. Styles does not cross herself; she is too good a Protestant for that. But she mutters fiercely to herself, and throws a look at me, of

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anger and of sorrow, and goes in search of Tom Lad.

Presently, after a dilettante sort of smoke, I hear good Rupert's hoofs upon the drive, and Mrs. Styles comes quietly in, a liqueur glass in one hand, and a decanter in the other—just as she has done since first I knew a hunting morn.

"If you please, sir, your mother always did as much for your father, and it would ill-become me to do less, though it may be the last time. The cherry brandy is of my own making, sir, and Tom says it's good. You can believe Tom, sir, when he's talking of tobacco or strong drink."

As of old, I sip my liquor, and ask for a second glass in proof of its rare quality, and at last I get into the saddle, and Tom Lad relinquishes my restless Rupert's head and murmurs, so low that his wife cannot hear, "Good luck, sir, and it's fain I'd be to be galloping beside ye."

Cathy and I, of course, foregather at the meet, and, equally of course, we ride together after that first "Right away" of the season, which never afterwards can stir one's pulses quite so briskly. The Squire is not here to-day,

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so she and I are left to represent our cheery triumvirate of father, daughter, and—save the mark!—the father's god-son. All is as it should be; the fox is willing, the hounds eager, the horses wild to follow; one's heart is in the skies, and mother-earth no more than a base medium on which horses' hoofs may rest; it is forward, forward, forward, with the dog-tails streaming like a field of corn in tempest and the red fox striding in the van.

Then, quite suddenly, my spirits sink. We have come to the tricky fence that borders Barton Meadows, and, as usual, I give the Babe a lead; but for some odd reason a qualm seizes me just as I am on the edge of my jump. What if the child should come to grief; I land squashily, but struggle through after a fashion and turn to see Cathy skimming over the fence as light-heartedly as the first swallow who thinks his coming brings the summer.

“Oh, how stupidly you took it!” she laughs.
“You deserved that ducking, Murphy.”
“I suppose I did,” I answer, meekly.

But I do not tell her what the cause was of this odd stupidity.

To-night, as I sit before a fire such as only Mrs.

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Styles can build, as I go quietly over the day's adventures and remember how constantly that fear for Cathy's safety returned, I am puzzled. Ever since the Babe could sit a hunter, I have steered her—followed her, alas, at times!—through the race; yet it has not once occurred to me, until to-day, that she could come to serious harm; and now I am looking forward to the next meet with something approaching dread. It is absurd to let one's nerves be active after a healthy, tiring day; I fill a last pipe, and resolutely put the thought from me. Yet it recurs, this same, persistent thought, and, do as I will, the words will form themselves again and again—*what if the child should come to grief?*

Finally, in a great rage, I lay down my pipe and go to bed; there is something ludicrous in growing angry entirely by one's self and with one's self; but it is a fault attaching peculiarly to bachelors, in or out of Arcady.

Mrs. Styles is in the passage as I go out; I dined at the Hall after hunting, and so have not seen the good woman until now.

"I've brought all the bones back, Stylesey, every one of them," I assure her.

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"Yes, this time, sir, but I'm not sure it wouldn't be a relief—if I may be bold to say it—just to see you get broken up now, sir, instead of later. It's worry that kills, and when I think of all the hunting days there'll be—and me like a hen with ailing chickens until you come home safe—well, sir, I doubt if I shall last the winter through."

"Oh, yes, you will, Stylesey. Think of all the other winters you have battled through."

"The pitcher goes often to the well, sir, in a manner of speaking."

This is Mrs. Styles's good-night; but whether she or I is the pitcher that will soon be broken is not quite clear. The problem does not trouble me, for I am asking myself, all through the time of undressing, "What if the child should come to grief?"

It is odd, distinctly odd—and a little aggravating.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BRIDGE OF AMITY

DO AS I would, I could not rid myself of that fear for Cathy's safety. The more I tried to shake it off, as the winter advanced, the more it weighed on me; until at last there came a day when Stylesey's prophecies were justified in part. Cathy and I were racing for the brush, when suddenly the dread came to me, as before, just at the edge of my leap—and something happened—and I awoke to find myself in bed, with Mrs. Styles beside me.

"Eh—what—which is to be first home, Cathy?" I find myself saying.

"*She* was, sir, I think," answers Mrs. Styles, with an indescribable accent upon the "she."

I begin gradually to recall a picture of horse's hoofs, wheeling skies, and dancing walls—to remember a dull sense of pressure that is scarcely pain—to guess that I have had a spill.

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"Did—did Miss Cathy get the brush?" I asked.

"I didn't inquire, sir. If *you* rate your life as cheap as a fox's tail, sir, I can't, for I've your poor, dead mother's feelings to consider."

"Oh, Stylesey," I groaned, "do take your thoughts away from your grandmother's profession. I'm as fit as can be, only a bit dizzy, and—"

"Two ribs broken, sir, the doctor says, and a nasty blow on the head."

"That means no more hunting for a while," I mutter. The words would have been inaudible, I am sure, to any one less keen of ear than Mrs. Styles; but she responds at once.

"Yes, sir, thanks be; I'm hoping we shall keep you snug and safe till the winter's over—though, to be sure, another winter will come on, and things will be as bad as ever, or worse. However, we must be thankful for our good luck while we have it, as the woman said when her husband fell down a quarry-pit and couldn't beat her no more."

"And you call this good luck?" I murmured, ruefully.

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"The best of good luck, sir," she answers, briskly ; "two ribs are nothing at all, sir, when compared with your neck. It's that I look to always, sir ; your neck weighs on a body, sir, at hunting-times as if——"

The doctor's entry disturbs her even flow of speech. He gives her a sharp glance, and frowns.

"Eh ? Talking the poor beggar's head off ? Oh, yes, you will kill him, Mrs. Styles, if you take pains, though he has the soundest constitution in the parish."

"I was only talking to the master for his good, sir," says Mrs. Styles, with dignity.

"What woman ever did talk for any other reason ? Talk they will, and I suppose they must find some sort of excuse for it."

I rather admire the doctor's handling of Mrs. Styles. He is not in the least *afraid* ; and this strikes me as singular. Indeed, I acquire a spurious courage of my own.

"Oh, it does me good, doctor, as a mustard-poultice would, or a black draught. Mrs. Styles never means any harm."

The words are innocent enough in seeming ; but, for some subtle cause, Stylesey cannot

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tolerate that quality of meaning no harm. She turns abruptly and speeds a parting shaft.

"Well, sir," she murmurs, with a glance of chastened satisfaction at me, "you will bear in mind I warned you, only this morning, that this was coming."

I let her depart, happy as only the successful prophet can be ; nor do I mention that she has warned me for at least a hundred hunting-morns, and that the odds are growing large in favor of one prophecy at least getting home to the winning-post. Instead, I bore with Stylesey's manifold attentions during the following weeks, bore with that persistent under-glow of what seemed almost satisfaction and self-approval ; I bore with the doctor's ridiculous commands that I should keep my bed for three times as long as was necessary ; but perhaps I bore most kindly of all with the visits of Cathy and the Squire, which were frequent ones, and which always gave me food for certain strange, new thoughts that yet seemed as old as my own power to think at all. I had leisure for thought, indeed ; but I found that whenever the Babe was in my mind, time passed with an odd speed and smoothness.

I learned many things during those few

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weeks ; and so it fell about that my first trip out-of-doors was to the stables, to apologize to Rupert for my conduct, and to explain my lengthy absence ; but my second journey was to the Bridge of Amity. I knew that I should find her there.

It was a winter's day, to make one's blood run high and quick. The glory of the year had long since gone, but already the first faint signs of another summer soon to come were showing themselves in grass and coppice. The King is dead—long live the King ! Another infant summer begins his reign while yet he lies in winter's cradle. And, oh, how crisp, and dry, and sweet, the round earth was this morning !

Instinct—a new-born instinct—had spoken a true word to me when it bade me seek the Bridge of Amity. Yes, Cathy was standing there, a figure of dainty warmth, half muffled in her furs ; one hand was on the rail, the other was busy with the sagacious head of Angus McLeod, and her eyes were on the quiet waters, slipping brown between their banks. She did not hear my step, and I was beside her before she had come out of this reverie that seemed to be so all-absorbing.

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"What are your dreams, Cathy?" I asked, laying my hand on hers—in comradeship, I thought.

The flush, showing first in either cheek, spread fast to chin, and brow, and breeze-stirred hair. I felt her hand tremble under mine, and wondered. Then—I have never found an explanation of what happened, nor sought one—there seemed to come a rare, strange light that flooded sky and wood and river—a light which wrapped us, as it were, in a veil that shut the crude world out. So clear one's understanding was during that brief moment which gave me Cathy—which gave me, too, a knowledge of the Eden-land which men may make and hold for all their lives.

There never was a word between us; we simply understood. Her gray eyes—how deep, and clear, and trustworthy was the light in them!—looked into mine, and somehow she was in my arms; and then again there came on me a wonder that she had ever been apart from me, since this was the one right way of life; and then the sunlight deepened over wood and river, and my heart found speech at last.

"For always, dear."

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"For always," she answered, low.

And that was all we said, or nearly all, for speech seemed rude, profane, in this rare temple of a world that had the Light upon its altars. Only, as I left her at the wicket-gate, and listened to the witchery of her gown as it made musical the crisp, clean winter-ways, I heard a voice, deep hidden somewhere in the best of me, which said that all my life should be a thanksgiving for this one morning's grace.

The morrow brought a vigorous sun that peered in at my open window at six of the clock, and startled me from a dream of some Bridge of Joy more wide and graceful than bridge ever was; then, as I drank in the sweet, wholesome breeze, the one word "Cathy" sounded in my heart, and I knew that it was better to waken than to dream.

No, my friends, the pencil and the paper, you shall not pry into that morning's happiness; you shall not know how the bacon and the eggs at breakfast-time were raised to the dignity of Olympian food; you shall not guess what eagerness and playful dreads went to the half-mile walk that took me up to Cathy. Such matters lie apart from speech, and I prefer

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instead to talk of the more sober aspect of the situation which had come about so swiftly and so strangely.

Indeed, as I reviewed the situation—after breakfast, and on my way through the Squire's park—there was one thought underlying all my natural elation, a pushing, rude, offensive thought. What would the Squire say to this? He had been friend and comrade to me at table, among the turnips, across the ticklish fences that abound in our particular hunting country; he had been like an elder brother to me in times of difficulty; and I had repaid him by claiming his daughter in this summary fashion. If only I had seen the danger, been in any way prepared for it; if Cathy, until that moment of enlightenment, had seemed more than a child whose comradeship was pleasant; why, then I could have fought temptation down and called it folly. Could I, though? In my heart I knew that, given yesterday again, I should act in the self-same way.

Yet facts were still unaltered. With a clearness that hurt me strangely I realized that Cathy was rich in this world's goods and gear. Little Cathy, who had learned to saddle a horse, to

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grow potatoes, to scamper over upland bogs and rocks and heather—Cathy a lady of high importance. At another time the thought would have been laughable; but now, realized so keenly for the first time, it made my conduct little short of criminal. If only there had been a son to inherit! If only she could slip out of the yoke of riches and share the little I had to offer her! If wishes were but prayers, and prayers were answered swiftly—say, before I saw the Squire this morning! But that was idle; riches are apt to be like the Old Man of the Sea, once you have them on your back, and it is as hard in one way to grow poor as in another way it is difficult to grow rich.

No, the thing must be faced, and I would see the Squire at once, without seeking Cathy first. I would lay the case before him, and let his wrath descend, and afterwards—well, afterwards I would find some way to keep Cathy and honor both.

The half-mile seemed a long one, I confess, for it was measured by a train of thought as long as Lovers' Lane.

And what most exasperated me was the fact that I was living, not in a novel, but in worka-

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day life. Such cases are so simple in a novel; your own land jumps with the Squire's; he has an only child, a daughter; from early days he has cherished a longing to unite the properties —hey, presto, after a few necessary alarms and excursions (say, of quarrels, a good strong scent of jealousy, and a rescue from tramps, a bull, or the machinations of a graceful villain), we have the villagers *en fête* for the wedding, and the little lambs bleating, and a magnificent bit of slow music at the close, to suggest the pomp and peace of the happy reign to come.

Ah, yes! But this is life that troubles me just now, and life is not susceptible to dramatic issues. It is true that my land jumps with the Squire's—jumps as a kitten might behind a mastiff. Am I to tell the Squire how fine a thing it will be to join the properties together —my twenty acres and his three thousand odd? I very much fear that he would laugh; indeed, I am sure he would.

Heigho! I am a good deal less of a man than I was at starting, and when I happen to meet the Squire at the orchard-gate, I feel like a schoolboy who is going to be thrashed in the near future. He greets me cheerily, and

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there is an aggressive grow of health and honesty about him that sinks my spirits lower still. For somehow I do not feel honest.

"I've done a mean thing, sir," I say, coming to the point at once, lest courage should forsake me.

"Oh, have you, my boy? Well, it is the first in your life, I'll be bound. What is it?"

Surely one must experience an ordeal of this sort to know how foolish one can feel; my courage, too, just at the moment of battle, evaporates into an unsubstantial vapor; the only salient feature of the scene, the only reality, is this big, jolly figure of a man who does not look old enough to be Cathy's father, who, indeed, is absurdly out of place as Cathy's father.

"I—I want to marry your daughter, and I told her so last night," I said at last.

No, there was nothing heroic in the speech; it might be called commonplace, and even that epithet would suggest flattery; how is it that a lover, in dramatic situations of this kind, can never play the game and talk in mellifluous, rolling verse? They can do it in plays, and in opera the hero is permitted to chant his hero-

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ism. This morning, though, I can't persuade myself that I have the makings of a hero in me.

The Squire, meanwhile, is eying me with an air which I am at a loss to understand. He has a quick temper on occasion, but the storm has not broken yet ; there is something quizzical in his regard.

" You want to marry my daughter ? " he says, in his Petty Sessions voice.

I nod gravely ; it is useless to blunder into speech again.

" The deuce you do ! And you have only to ask to have, I suppose ? "

My own temper breaks, quite unexpectedly ; it is trying work, this being a lover, and rage would have been much more easy to bear than this judicial irony.

" If she had been free of your confounded acres, sir, I could give her all she needed."

It is odd how little we understand ourselves ; that I, who pride myself on a certain power to take life as it comes, should so address a friend, an elder, and Cathy's father, was a surprise ; the words slipped out independently of thought or will, and I stood aghast at my own folly.

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Whatever chances had been mine before, I had certainly spoiled them now.

This thing called love would seem to invert the whole natural order. The Squire is not telling me to exit by the orchard-gate, with a delicate suggestion of grooms and a neighbouring horse-pond ; he is struggling with the composure that has been so hard to bear ; finally, he breaks into a roar of laughter, and links his arm in mine, and turns me in the direction of the house.

"I believe you, my boy ! You'd rather come wooing as the big man giving all, eh ? Well, you can't—but, just because you have that kind of preference (damned rare in this world, boy), I'll—I'll let you come and have a last look at Cathy before I send you off for good and all."

Bewilderment, suspicion, are my chief companions on the way. What does this friendliness mean ? Perhaps it is only a more subtle vengeance ; perhaps—but we are in the hall, and there is Cathy by the window, tying and untying knots in a bit of cambric handkerchief as if the world offered no more grave employment. She glances up, and the look she gives me—of

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protest, pleading, and great happiness, all mingled like rain and sun and wind upon an April day—brings back the manhood to me. One must be something of a hero to have earned a glance so full of happy meaning.

“Cathy, here’s a fellow who grumbles about your prospects in life. He came to me this morning expressly to grumble about them ; he called my acres—*my* acres, if you please, as clean as any in the country—he called them *confounded*, and he meant a stronger word. Said he’d marry you, Cathy, if you’d give up everything just to tickle his pride.”

“Oh, Dad, don’t—*don’t* jest about it,” pleaded the child.

“I told him he could take you or leave you as you stood—didn’t I, boy ? Or did I forget ? You were so tragic, and it made me laugh. Perhaps I did forget.”

“Do you mean it, sir ? ” I cried.

“Ask Cathy,” was all he said, as he went out. We could hear him laughing for quite a minute afterwards, as if it were a jest to hand over his daughter to another’s keeping. Then Cathy was lying very close to me, and again there came a kindly veil, of gossamer and gold,

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between ourselves and the mere remainder of creation.

After dinner that night, when Cathy had left us to the best that Digby could conjure from the cellars, I looked tentatively at my host.

"This must seem sudden to you, sir," I ventured.

Again he laughed. Why do fathers show such hysterical desire for mirth at times?

"Well, scarcely," he said. "I have looked for it any time these twelve months past."

"But I didn't guess it myself till yesterday."

"But I was a looker-on, you see. Seriously, now—for you must have a pinch of common-sense lurking somewhere—do you think I should have let Cathy go over hill and dale with you as she has done, if—well, I don't want to flatter you, but—"

And then, I am sorry to say, he did flatter me, and it was harder to bear than the meeting earlier in the day; but hardest of all was the thought that he had looked for this. What was to us a miracle, a rare and never-heard-of sweetness, became, under this fatherly, cool outlook, a thing expected, usual, on a worldly plane.

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I had to go to Cathy, soon as I could escape, for proof that this was not so ; her logic is, I think, more subtle and more convincing than her father's.

"Mrs. Styles will have to be told," I said at parting. My voice did not tremble, but that was owing to my regard for Cathy, who would not care to find the coward in me quite at once.

"Oh, you poor boy, yes ! Shall I—shall I run down to-morrow and tell her ? She is almost tame, you know, with me."

So the child has already found out the weak places in my armor ; I can only do my best to present a martial front.

"Mrs. Styles has been treated a little too well ; it is time I took her in hand," I say, and almost make myself believe in my own firmness.

When I reach home, however, though Mrs. Styles happens to be in the kitchen—kept out of bed, she explains, by press of work that would long ago have killed most women—I decide that it is not necessary to tell my news to-night. It would only trouble the good woman—and she has served me well—and it is only right to give her one more untroubled night of rest.

CHAPTER XX

HOW THE GOOD NEWS WAS BROUGHT TO STYLESEY

I FEEL vaguely uneasy when Mrs. Styles brings in my breakfast next morning; it is clear that nothing will be gained by putting off my announcement, and yet—and yet—Stylesey looks so practical, so big, so full of the things which she will find to say, that my heart sinks.

She has set down the dishes, and hovers vaguely about the door.

“About lunch, sir?” she suggests at last.
“Will you have Savoy or Cauliflower?”

“Cauliflower? Savoy?” I echo. “Does it matter much, Mrs. Styles?”

The truth is, I am trying to be firm, to make a clean breast of the truth. I am filling a pipe, too, this being, I have found, a useful ally in times of stress. If you are simply smoking you cannot make half the by-play that you can

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with pouch and pipe and matches, and you can assume, moreover, a carelessness, hardly to be attained by other means, in the ramming down of the tobacco after filling.

"Just as you think, sir," Mrs. Styles responds; but the cabbages are going backwards-way—I never did hold, sir, with these new-fangled seeds they sell nowadays—and the cauliflowers, too, are passing their best. It does seem a waste, as one might say."

This is Mrs. Styles's outlook upon what I regard as a well-stocked garden. Of course, there must be produce going to waste, if one is to insure a sufficient supply; but it is the waste alone upon which Stylesey fixes her attention. Moreover, is it not enough that there should be a good supply of vegetables at this wintry season of the year? Stylesey, I believe, would have me consume the whole crop, now, at one Titanic sitting, rather than have a suspicion of waste.

"Let me have both, then," I suggest, by way of settling the difficulty. "And, by the way, Mrs. Styles, we—we shall want more vegetables by and by."

At the time this seemed a delicate piece of

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finesse, a rather brilliant opening of the subject uppermost in my mind ; now it seems simply funny, and I realize how frightened I must have been on that winter's morning.

"Indeed, sir?" she responds, with a defensive, yet bellicose, air of awaiting my good pleasure.

"Yes—the fact is—I am going to be married, you see."

For a moment, silence; then two plump hands go up to her hips and rest there.

"Well, of course, it's not for me to say, sir," she begins.

"No, I scarcely think it is," I rejoin, pleasantly.

"And of course, I shall have to leave you, sir, and it seems hard, though I've looked for it, and prayed against it, so to say, and all Tom does is to play about with his cows, and his pigs, and his pigeons, so I shall have to keep him as well, sir, and soon it will come to mean the poor-house, for I used to be younger once, and it's hard to work fingers to the bone when there's rheumatics in them—not to speak of the children, poor lambs, that were never reared to workhouse victuals."

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The speed of Mrs. Styles's words, the easy flow of her imagination, remove my fear of her. I simply sit and smoke, and am lost in a kind of awed imagination, as if I watched a flood burst through all bounds. There is always something elemental, Titanic, about a woman who loses, in a moment, the thread of that reason which is at the best a hothouse growth with her.

"You and yours need never trouble the workhouse," I put in, as she momentarily loses breath. "Better stop here, Mrs. Styles, for we could not get on well without you."

The flattery is wasted.

"*We*," she echoes. "With due respect, sir, I'm not used to *we*'s. You have been master of your house, and I've been master of mine, and now there'll be some one coming who's neither flesh nor fish, as a body might say."

"I am going to be married, Mrs. Styles. That is certain."

"Well, sir, it's sad—and I who knew your mother before you. Ay, and she never guessed, poor bonnie lady, that her son would come to this."

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"Still, she came to it, if you care to think of it, Mrs. Styles; and so did you."

The shaft was barbed, and I reveled as I watched it strike well home.

"So I did, sir, so I did. A maid's a fool till she's married, and all too late to alter. There's Tom yonder—easiful and go-as-you-please—and he never seems to know I keep him."

I begin to wonder what my own share is of the capital and labor which keeps our commonwealth in working order. Tom Lad asserts that he maintains us all; his wife is sure that she keeps Tom Lad; my own place in the homestead dwindles to a corner near the ingle-nook, where graybeards past their work are entertained of charity.

"Life is hard for you, Mrs. Styles," I say, with gravity—"but, spite of all, I'm going to be married."

"I've seen a deal of folk married, sir, and a deal of folk—most all of 'em—who wished they were free again. There was my brother's wife's sister, now, as bonnie a piece of won't-you-come-and-kiss me ways as ever stepped; and she—"

The floods were out again, and I listened to

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the onward sweep of the waters. Truly, I had not counted all the costs of my adventure, nor guessed what store of reminiscences, uniformly gloomy, I should draw from my good hench-woman. Like a tired sea she came to rest at last, however, and I ventured another remark.

“This is all very interesting ; but let us come to the application. The particular lady, you see, might make just the difference between happiness and misery.”

“It’s all one, sir, with wedlock. Cut and come again, as the widower said when he tried for the sixth time to find a good wife—cut and come again, it’s all one. The same with husbands, sir, only worse. It would be a goodish world if there were no folk in it, sir, and that I always shall say.”

“Then you don’t care to inquire the lady’s name ? ”

“No, sir, I don’t,” she answered, in the deeply-respectful tone which is more awful than any other ; “seeing I know it, sir, and have known it was coming, as I have said, for many a month past.”

So my secret had been plain, not only to the Squire, but to Mrs. Styles; probably I had

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made it plain to the whole parish ; yet all the while I had been hiding my head in the rose-bush of fantasy, not knowing the things that were plain to all the world outside.

" Not that she isn't as sweet a little lady as ever crossed my kitchen threshold, sir," Mrs. Styles proceeds, with a shade more warmth ; " and not but what pretty and good would be no more than calling a spade a spade in talking of her—but I'm full of warnings, sir ; I take it from my grandmother, who never could sleep the night before a wedding, for warnings that the young folk would live to wish that they were dead—or before a funeral, for fear that the wine would have gone the wrong way for want of fortifying. Some said my grandmother had 'the sight,' sir, and they say it goes in families ; I don't know about that, I'm sure, but whenever I'm told of a wedding, I feel as if a goose was walking over my grave, and that's beyond disputing."

Mrs. Styles has found her stride again ; but by and by it grows clear that she is wearing herself out, and I am preparing to speak a soft word in season—for I am anxious my good Styles should reconcile herself to my change of

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life—when a shadow crosses the French windows that lie open to the sunlight. I look up, to find Cathy and her father standing thiere; the Squire has a gun over his shoulder and a dog at his heels, and Cathy's face is brimful of roguery as she looks from Mrs. Styles to myself, and back again.

"I think you have told Mrs. Styles," she observes; "that was very brave of you—and I thought you might be afraid to do it quite by yourself without support—and I told Dad he had better run down with me and see what was happening."

"Mrs. Styles knows everything; she is leaving in a month's time," I answer, calmly.

The good woman's face is a study. Surprise and consternation mingle with offended wrath.

"Indeed, sir, there was no time mentioned, if I may say so—not by me, sir."

"No, I named the time," I proceed, remorselessly.

"Very well, sir, if you say I must go, I must, but it's hard to think that I, who knew your mother before you, and never thought to leave your service, not if there were earthquakes regularly in the garden——"

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She is on the verge of tears, and already has a corner of her apron ready for emergencies ; so Cathy, kind little soul, goes up to her and strokes her face in a peculiar, caressing way that she reserves for the old and the afflicted.

" See, Stylesey, dear, they ought to have let me tell you all about it ; they don't understand, do they, these clumsy men, and there's no one can manage you properly, Stylesey, but me."

Mrs. Styles makes one last half-hearted effort. "*Manage me ?*" she cries. " I'm too old to be managed, miss, and when I was young it was harder still, as my good man will tell you any day you ask him."

" Stylesey, I'm coming to live here some day. Aren't you just a wee bit glad ? "

And then the other breaks down with astonishing suddenness, and puts her arms about this lassie, whom she loves, and has loved since babyhood.

" Bless you, my lamb, I wouldn't have had it any but you for a bag of golden sovereigns," she cries, spasmodically. " You're just the one mistress for the master, and so I was going to tell him a while back, if he would only have listened."

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The Squire catches my eye, and we go out together into the sunlight that slants across the shaven lawn.

"The gorse must be blooming freely," he says; "there is a little, just a little too much kissing in the parish—come along, my boy, and let's see if we can find a brace or two of partridge. There's your dog yonder, blinking in the sunshine; he'll be glad of a frolic."

In a moment Cathy is all alarm. "Murphy, you can't! Why, you are only just out of your room!"

I do not mean to look foolish in the Squire's eyes, however; besides, it is sheer happiness to think of handling a gun again; and so I assure Cathy, softly, firmly, with a vague feeling that it is wise to take my stand at once.

I am glad that Mrs. Styles is reconciled; but, as I move down between the turnips—languidly as yet, and with an eye to what the doctor will say if he hears of the doings of his convalescent—I speculate on the odd structure of woman's brain. This is an old, lazy habit of mine, though last night's scene had weaned me of it, I had thought, for good and all. Here was Mrs. Styles, as honest as the red-faced sun

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itself, who could assert, with apparent good faith, that she had welcomed Cathy's coming from the first; on the other hand, I knew that she had uttered darkling prophecies, had seemed determined to leave my service, had vowed by the Lares and Penates of her well-scrubbed house that I was rushing on destruction. Yet in a moment she had faced about, had melted from Cassandra's rôle to that of a rather limp and tearful nurse of melodrama. Apparently, moreover, she believed in herself from start to finish of the play; and that was curious.

Ay, I had it! It was Cathy's self that had worked this seeming miracle. Cathy could charm a lump of millstone-grit to believe in anything—what had I done to deserve her?—how the sun rippled on her hair, as if—whirr! Bang, bang! A covey had risen scarcely twenty yards ahead, and I had missed with both barrels. Clearly, the Babe was making great changes in my life, for I was a passable shot once on a day; yet somehow I do not regret, and the mellow sunlight on the mellower land of corn and dew-bright turnip-tops seems to round off a world that no sane man could cavil at.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BACHELOR'S RECASTATION

A NOTHER spring is here, and all the fairy-bells of Arcady are ringing. Lilac and peony and wild pansy are feeding once again on dew and sun and good, ripe mother-earth ; the bees are fussy as of old ; there's not a bird but has his mate, and some of them already have growing families to minister to their exceeding pride. And Cathy and I seem to understand it all so much better than we used to do ; we have caught the key-note of this busy life of busy trees and busy flowers and busier living things ; it is not good, especially in Arcady, for man or maid to live alone.

It occurs to me to-night—the bees are slumberous in the lime trees overhead—that I promised once on a time to explain the whereabouts of Arcady ; but whether I can redeem the promise I do not know, since every man

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must find his own. There are plain highroads to guide the wanderer thither ; he must pass through lonely byways, where the mud lies thick at times ; he must cross by unknown wastes of moor and fell, with only his heart for compass, and only a steady eye and an unswerving faith in this same compass to guide his steps. Yet this much I may tell him for his cheer ; he will, at long intervals, gain this or that clean, well-found highway leading to his goal, and he will know these roads by certain curious signposts scattered here and there—such as “The Road of Country Quiet,” “The Road of Charity,” “The Road of Dainty Woman”—and he will find the going very smooth and pleasant on these highways, so that he will branch off again among the needful short-cuts with a wondrous sense of rest and new-found vigor.

And that, believe me, is all I know of the royal road to Arcady ; but I know that, once found, the land is like no other land that lies beneath the sunshine and the stars. As for my theories that Arcady is womanless, or as nearly so as possible—well, I laugh at them, for I have Cathy, and I frankly could not live without her.

The Bachelor's Recantation

So now, being possessed of all that a man's heart need crave, I have found a grievance—two grievances, in fact, just deep enough to keep prosperity sweet, just light enough to cause no interference with my happiness. One is a regret that Cathy should not have come to me as poor as any beggar-maid ; for the sweetness of simplicity is hers, and I would have had her come with no more wealth than the gown that keeps rude winds from her, than the rippling nut-brown hair, which in itself is wealth. It would almost seem that the fates, at Cathy's birth, had made the crude man's attempt to gild, pure gold ; else why did they add their hateful background of the lands and gear to this lassie who is the heart of Arcady ? I must be forgiven if I prove myself deep in love, forgiven, too, if I am unashamed—nay, proud—to make no secret of it; for love of such as Cathy—oh, be sure I am proving it day by day—is the best gift that Nature, in her kindly, all-wise care, has given to us men who seek our mates, and need them, and must have them if the world's work is to be rightly done.

My second grievance, a slighter one, becomes strangely real now and then. Some day these

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well-loved twenty acres of mine must become a mere corner of the bigger property ; they will feel slighted, thrust into the outskirts, so to speak, instead of being the center and the whole of our regard ; do as we will, Cathy and I, this sweep of lawn and muddled flower-beds, this kitchen-garden with its red-brick walls, the paddock yonder, the orchard with its yellow fruit—all these will lose something of what they now possess, and I shall feel the change as much as they. It has always seemed to me that Naboth got more cheer from his tight little vineyard—necessarily got more cheer—than all Ahab's lands could have given him ; and it was a sense of this, surely, that first set covetousness in Ahab's heart. The vineyard was small enough to love—just as women must be small to be loved rightly—and Ahab watched this lowly Naboth going his ways, content, untroubled, secure in his passion for his bit of land, a passion which would have been dwarfed by the very splendor of his over-lord's dominions. So Ahab reasoned, faultily, but humanly, that if he tacked on this little corner to his own possessions he would inherit Naboth's great tranquillity of love. Alas, that there was

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no one to suggest that he should exchange all he owned for this one plot, none to tell him that the sterile joy of majesty might well be bartered for a small holder's fruitful days of land-love and land-tilling.

It is a little ridiculous, is it not? The drama all reversed in my case, and Naboth had to lose his vineyard, in a sense, by adding to it. The Squire, however, is a mighty hunter yet, and the crisp brown hair denies his right to a place among the elders; what is to come shows far-off as a dream, and Cathy and I, meanwhile, can find no single boon to ask of the kindly, over-ruling Powers—unless it be to learn more surely, day by day, how best to give to others a share of our own bounty. We tend our flowers, our lettuces, and peas, and the pansies that are our special pride; we add to our menagerie of goats and pigs, turkeys and blue Dorkings, and what not; we feed the birds in winter still, and I come near to household strife by shooting certain of them what time the peas are podding. Tom Lad is still mighty with his hands, and Stylesey a jewel of great price. Strangers come to our gates as of old; the poacher, the shameless, merry tramp,

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the man in real need, and the woman in distress; we are of the world-family still, though round about our inner life we have reared a hedge of love whose branches let no thief nor rash intruder by. It is Arcady indeed—though now I walk it as a Benedick.

THE END

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